

YOUNG KLONDIKE

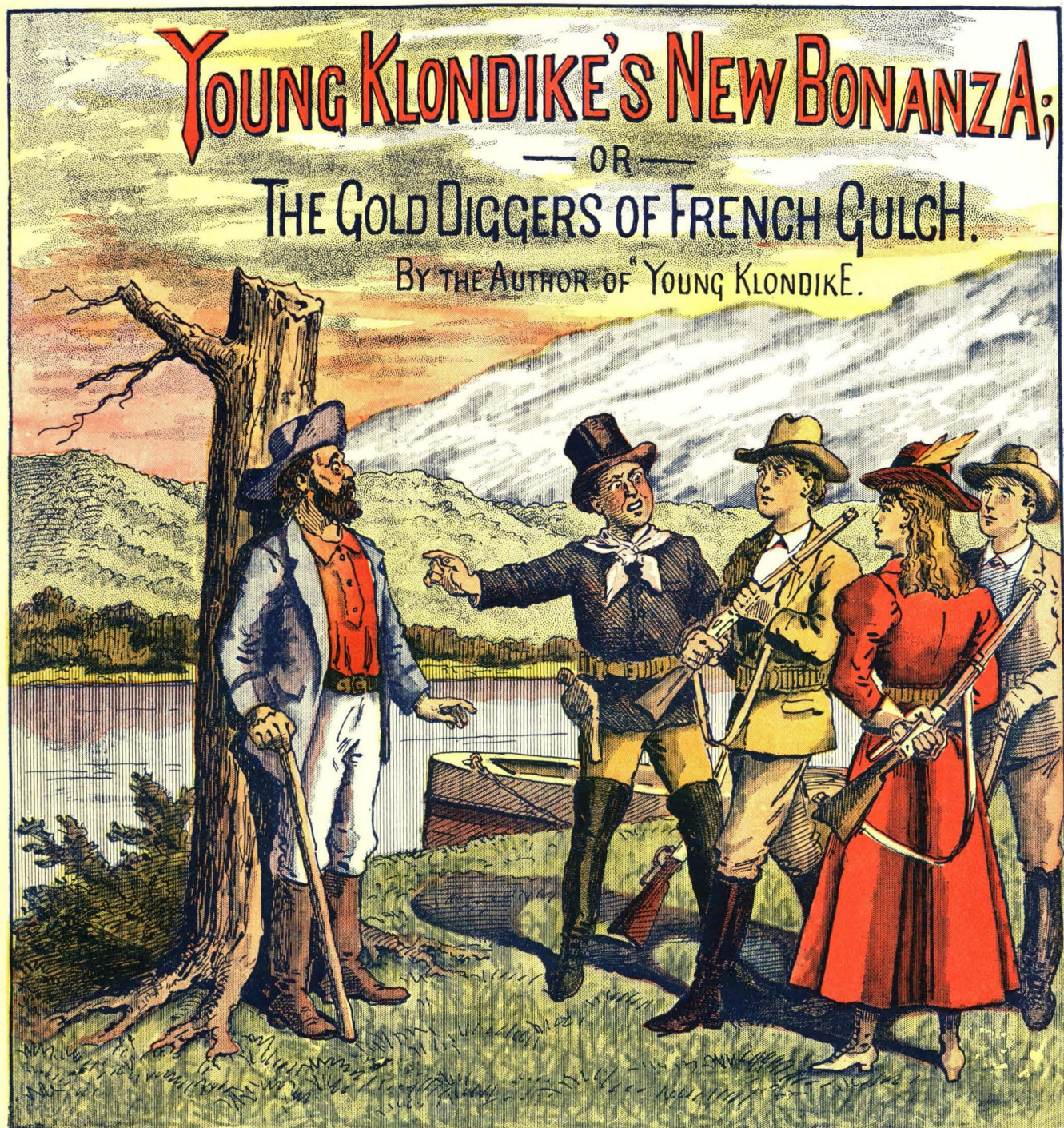
STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER

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"He lies!" cried the Unknown. "Ask him again, Young Klondike, and fire unless he tells the truth."
"Hold on, I cave, boss!" cried the man. "I did see the Reds." "I thought so!"
They had a girl prisoner with them?" "Yes."

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YOUNG KLONDIKE'S NEW BONANZA,

OR,

THE GOLD DIGGERS OF FRENCH GULCH.

BY AUTHOR OF YOUNG KLONDIKE.

CHAPTER I.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

"HELP, help, help!"

It was the second time the cry rang out on the stillness of the night.

Ned Golden heard it in his sleep the first time it came, and dreamed that Indians had attacked the tent pitched on the rocky bluff at the upper end of El Dorado Creek, far up in the wonderful Klondike country, where you may find gold anywhere if you only dig deep enough in the frozen ground.

"Help, help, help!"

Now the cry came a second time, and this time Dick Luckey, who was rolled up in a big pair of blankets beside his partner, heard it also, and turned over and went to sleep again, but it woke Ned up this time, and he sprang to his feet and ran out of the tent.

It was a perfect night. The stars were shining as bright as diamonds, and the wooded outlines of the big mountains which surrounded the camp on every side, stood out darkly but with startling distinctness.

Ned looked about in every direction but could distinguish nothing, and be it understood Young Klondike's eyes were as sharp as they make them, and if there was anything suspicious to be seen they were quite able to take it in at a glance.

"Strange who it can be," he muttered. "I certainly heard something. I'm sure I did."

Then he showed that he wasn't sure by adding:

"I wonder if I could have dreamed it after all?"

But no! Young Klondike had not been dreaming and he was now made fully aware of it, for all in the same moment the cry was heard still again.

"Help! Help! Help!"

This time there was no mistake.

The sound seemed to come from down at the foot of the bluff.

Young Klondike ran to the edge of the bluff, and strained his eyes to see what there was to be seen, but once more he found himself puzzled and disappointed, for he could see just nothing at all.

"Dick! Zed! Hello! Wake up!" cried Ned, running back to the tent.

This brought Dick Luckey to his feet in an instant, and the Unknown, who lay on his back snoring, opened first one eye, and then the other, and then springing up, ran out of the tent to join Ned and Dick at the edge of the bluff.

Edith Welton, who slept in a little tent adjoining the larger one, did not seem to have been disturbed by the cry at all.

"What's the row, boys?" demanded the Unknown. "Are the Indians after us, or is there a blizzard coming? If it ain't either, what is it? By the Jumping Jeremiah! a fellow who is suddenly wakened out of his sleep in this fashion has a right to know the cause."

"The cause is that I heard someone calling for help!" replied Ned, "but I'll be blest if I can make out what it means."

"Help! Help! Help!"

Still again the cry was repeated, and this time the boys and their odd companion were able to follow the direction of the sound. Looking up the creek they perceived an overturned boat, lodged against a sunken rock perhaps, with a dark figure in the water clinging to her side.

"Ye gods and little fishes! A wreck! Here you are, boys!" the Unknown cried.

"It's a man in the water—or a boy," said Dick.

"No, it ain't anything of the sort; it's a woman or a girl," declared Ned.

"Ned is right," said the Unknown. "It's a girl fast enough, and we've got to hustle or she'll be drowned."

"There's a boat coming down the creek to the rescue now!" cried Ned.

"Two of them!" echoed Dick.

"Three!" exclaimed the Unknown. "No! By the Jumping Jeremiah, they ain't boats at all, they are Indian canoes!"

"There's going to be trouble," declared Ned. "We must hurry to the rescue! Follow me."

"And leave Edith behind us?" said Dick. "I say no."

"You stay and take care of her. I'll go with Ned," said the Unknown, hastily.

"I'm going," said Dick, "you stay;" and go he did, and the Unknown remained behind.

Young Klondike and his partner waited only to get their Winchester rifles out of the tent and ran down upon the shore leaving the Unknown on the bluff to watch the tent with one eye and their movements with the other.

At the foot of the bluff a neat little naphtha launch lay moored, especially constructed for work on the creeks which empty into the Klondike river.

Many a pleasant hour Young Klondike, Dick, Edith and the Unknown had put in sailing up and down the creeks and the river in this launch, for our party, although among the most successful gold hunters on the Klondike, and the owners of several rich mines now being worked under competent superintendents, had become so thoroughly wedded to the chances of a prospector's life that they were constantly seeking out new diggings and finding them, too.

It was this which had taken them away up at the headwaters of El Dorado Creek.

They were bound up into French Gulch, and the plan was to penetrate further into that desolate region than any prospecting party had yet gone.

This was their first night out from Young Klondike, as Golden & Luckey's principal mine located further down El Dorado Creek was called.

They had passed beyond the mine limit of the El Dorado diggings and had not yet come upon the numerous camps at the entrance to French Gulch.

Ned hastily lit the lamp, but he had no sooner done so than he realized that it was not going to do to wait for the launch.

"We must swim for it!" cried Dick, seized with the same idea.

"That's what!" replied Ned. "Run for your life, or rather, for the girl's life, Dick! I don't know what I was thinking about when I stopped to light the lamp."

They ran on under the bluff, cheered on by the Unknown, who kept shouting to them from above.

"There's six canoes full of Indians!" was his last cry. "Look out for yourselves, boys! They can't get up here without my knowing it. I'm going to follow them up along the top of the bluff."

It was just as well that he did, if Young Klondike and Dick wanted to know the outcome of the affair.

For they had not gone any great distance before their way was cut off by the rocky bluff projecting far out into the water.

They could not get round it, and consequently if they meant to complete the rescue, there was nothing left for it but to swim.

As soon as they had grasped the situation, they did not hesitate an instant.

Throwing aside hat, shoes, coat and vest, they leaped into the icy water and swam around the obstacle, landing on the other side.

But they were still some distance away from the overturned boat, and the Indian canoes were coming down the creek as fast as paddles could take them.

The cry was no longer repeated. The boys thought they could still see the dark form of the girl clinging to the rock, but still they could not be sure.

"You can't make it!" shouted the detective. "They'll beat you, try as you will. You may as well give it up!"

What the Unknown said was true enough, and yet the boys were not of the sort to give up tamely in anything they had once undertaken to do.

They ran on, hoping against hope.

It was no use.

Before they had half covered the distance the foremost of the canoes had reached the sunken rock.

They saw a big buck lean over and drag the girl into the canoe by the hair.

She seemed to struggle in his arms, and her face was turned toward the boys, and her hands stretched out despairingly, though whether she saw them or not they could not tell.

"Help! Help! Help!" she cried, as the Indian threw her back into the canoe.

Then all the canoes were abruptly turned round and paddled off up the creek.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF THE DUMB AND ARMLESS MAN WHO DIED WITH THE RISING SUN.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah! they've got her!" shouted the Unknown from the bluff.

The Indians heard the shout, and turning in their canoes, several let fly with their rifles.

The Unknown might have come out at the little end of the horn if he had not dodged down on the bluff.

Possibly the Indians did not see the boys at all, for they did not look back again, but paddled around a bend in the creek and disappeared from view.

Young Klondike and Dick felt terribly chagrined.

It seemed to them both as though the thing might have been avoided. Especially did it so seem to Ned,

who felt that if he had acted when he first heard the cry the girl might have been saved.

"We must follow up that girl!" he said, emphatically. "Of course we don't know who she is, and we may never know, but we must make an effort to save her just the same."

Dick raised no objection.

Only thing was about Edith. It seemed a shame to rouse her out of her night's sleep, and yet they could not leave her behind.

They hurried back to camp, swimming around the point as before.

When they reached the launch they found it ready for business, for the lamp was still burning.

All that now remained was to wake Edith, get their traps down into the launch and make the start.

The Unknown had already done the former and begun on the latter.

Edith met them as they came up on the bluff and was fully informed of what had occurred.

"Poor creature! Why it is just dreadful!" she exclaimed. "Of course we must try and do something for her. Boys, there is not a moment to be lost."

Edith had come down to the edge of the bluff loaded with hampers of provisions and other things, and the Unknown who had already struck the tents, was packing them up as fast as he could.

The boys hurried up and lent a hand, and soon everything was securely packed away in the boat, which was to go in tow of the launch.

"I suppose we've wasted altogether too much time," remarked Edith, as they started. "I'm afraid we are going to have trouble in finding the trail."

"There's the canoes," replied the Unknown. "They can't very well get them off the creek without leaving some trace behind."

They kept steadily on, and in a few moments drew near the sunken boat.

"Look! Look over there under the rocks!" cried the Unknown, whose eye was out for everything. "Ain't that a man?"

"By gracious, it's nothing else!" exclaimed Dick, "but what's he doing there, I'd like to know?"

Certainly the man cut a very curious figure.

He sat there under the rock all hunched up looking off toward the launch.

One would have supposed he would wave his hand or shout, do something or say something, but, on the contrary he made no move and uttered no sound.

"He's dead!" gasped Edith.

"Not much," said Dick. "Didn't you see him move just then?"

"I did," said Ned. "He certainly moved."

"Hello, there, neighbor! Hello!" bawled the Unknown.

But the man might as well have been a wooden post for all the answer they got.

Ned pulled out a powerful glass which he always carried and turned it upon him.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed, "this is more than strange."

"What?" asked Dick.

"I can't make it out at all."

"Perhaps we can if you'll tell us what it is!" said the Unknown.

"Why, he's got no arms."

"Pshaw! Nonsense! His hands are behind him."

"No, they ain't. I tell you he's got no arms. If you don't believe it look for yourself."

Ned passed the glass over to the Unknown who took a look.

"That's right. He's an old fellow and he's got no arms," he declared. "Ye gods and little fishes, he must have a tongue though."

Then he shouted again:

"Hello there under the rocks! Hello!"

He kept his eyes on the strange figure as he called, and could see him looking steadily in their direction, but there was no answer to the hail.

"It beats the band," said Dick. "Of course we've got to go over and see who he is."

"Upon my word he's hailing us with his foot!" cried Edith. "Look! Look!"

They had all seen it. The strange figure on the rocks suddenly raised one leg and began waving his foot as any one else might wave their hand.

"That man is armless and in trouble," declared Ned. "We've got to help him. He can't get off of there to save his soul."

They were now nearly opposite the spot and they turned the launch in the direction of the man.

As they drew near and were able to see him more distinctly both Ned and the Unknown repeatedly called to him, but with no result at all.

"I shouldn't wonder a bit if he is in the boat with the girl," said Dick. "I think that's just as sure as that he's dumb."

"Do you know," said the Unknown, "I was just wondering if he wasn't a dummy."

"That's what he is—an armless dummy," declared Dick. "Here's more mystery for you, and it wouldn't surprise me if it was one we'd find it hard to solve."

But the mystery was to be easier solved than Dick imagined, as will now be shown.

When they came up to the rocks the armless man staggered to his feet and looked at them appealingly.

Fancy an armless dummy! Just stop and think how helpless a creature he is!

He cannot talk, he cannot express himself by signs. All he can do is to look at you, unless, indeed, he is able to write with his toes.

This man took it out in looking.

When Young Klondike spoke to him he only replied with his eyes.

These filled with tears as he nodded his head toward the overturned boat still stuck against the rock.

"Was it your daughter?" asked the Unknown, still unable to realize that the man could not speak.

Of course there was no answer—Ned really did not expect any.

He sprang out of the launch and helped the poor old fellow to get in.

The moment he was seated the dumb man showed that he was by no means an idiot.

He began nodding his head in the most violent and expressive manner, and yet with all his efforts he was quite unable to convey his meaning to the passengers in the launch, until Edith suddenly exclaimed :

"Why, it's his feet he's motioning at. He wants something in connection with them."

Edith had hit it.

Indeed, all doubt was removed by the dummy suddenly raising his right foot and putting it in the Unknown's lap.

"Hello, hello! By the Jumping Jeremiah, what do you want me to do? Shake your foot?" exclaimed the Unknown.

"I believe he wants you to take off his shoe and stocking," said Edith, and she made signs to that effect.

The man immediately nodded several times.

"That's it," said the Unknown. "You've hit it. The old fellow is a strange one. He looks mighty sick, too. I never saw a man with that peculiar pasty look in his face, who wasn't next to death's door with heart disease, and I think that's where he is, with all due respect to the present company in this boat."

"As none of the present company in this boat have the least disposition to dispute you, all you've got to do is to go ahead and pull off his shoe and stocking," said Ned, "and the sooner you do it the quicker we'll find out what he wants."

"Which same shall be done right now," replied the Unknown, and at it he went with results which they little imagined at the time.

The moment the shoe and stocking were removed, the dumb man began to go through the motions of writing with his toes.

"It can't be!" cried the Unknown.

"What can't be?" questioned Ned.

"That he wants to write—that he can write with his toes."

"That's just what he's trying to make us understand."

"Try him," said Edith.

"You bet I will!" replied Ned, and he produced a lead pencil.

The dummy nodded violently, bending his head forward.

"He wants you to put the pencil between his toes," said Dick.

But this was a mistake. When Ned started to do it the man shook his head many times.

Suddenly he leaned forward, and before Ned was aware of his intention, he had seized the pencil between his teeth.

Then, with another dexterous motion, he put his foot up to his mouth—a very difficult thing to do, by

the way—and adjusted the pencil between the big toe and the next one.

"Yes, sir; he wants to write," cried the Unknown. "Give him a piece of paper, Ned."

Young Klondike took out his memorandum book and laid it on his knee in such a position that the dummy could write.

The unfortunate stranger soon showed that he was able to do it.

He handled the pencil in a way wonderful to behold, and soon showed that he was a thorough master of this strange art, for he wrote in a clear, legible hand—we mean foot—the following lines :

"My name is Michael McIntyre. I am a dying man. Help me to recover my daughter from the Indians, and I will tell you where the richest gold diggings on the Klondike lie. They shall be yours to do what you please with, if you will swear that my daughter shall have her share."

"Come, that's business. The old duffer is no fool," cried the Unknown.

The old man regarded his face attentively and then wrote with extraordinary rapidity :

"Don't try to talk to me; I'm deaf and dumb and it's no use. Write your answer in the book."

"Right up to date!" chuckled the Unknown. "Business right down to the ground. Give him the answer Ned."

Ned took the book and wrote as follows :

"We will do what you say. We will help you all we can. We saw your daughter carried away by the Indians and are on our way to rescue her now."

Then he placed the book on his knee again and the old man began to write with a rapidity that seemed fairly astounding as follows :

"I came up to the Klondike a year ago with my daughter. I am a miner. I worked in the gold digging in British Columbia for years. I was one of the first in French Gulch, but of course I couldn't work myself, for I lost my arms two years ago by a boiler explosion. My daughter Jennie helped me. We hired an Indian named Kemush to work with us, and we have taken out over one hundred thousand dollars which is in bank at Dawson City. Last week a crowd of prospectors jumped in on us and took possession of my principal shaft, claiming to have bought it of the man whose claim I jumped, and that my jump title was no good. I tried to fight them on it. No use. They drove us off, and I believe hired Kemush to set the Indians on us. They mean to have us killed so that they can hold on to my claim. They made a mistake though. The claim on the other side of the hill where I sunk two holes is the richest. I covered in the holes. They are between the two big pine trees. I think that you could make a good thing there."

Mr. McIntyre stopped writing and leaned back in the boat. He looked very much fatigued, and so white and faint that the Unknown gave him a drink from his whisky flask, which seemed to do him good.

Meanwhile Ned wrote :

"We will go to your place and try to help you, but I suppose you had rather we would follow up the Indian trail and find your daughter first?"

The armless man, who had dropped the pencil on the seat, picked it up with his teeth and wrote as follows :

"We were upset in our boat. I managed to kick ashore, but, of course, I couldn't help poor Jennie. It was terrible. We knew the Indians were after us. I do not fear for her life, though. Kemush will carry her back to camp. The job was put up by Joe Patton. He wants to marry Jennie, but he is a scoundrel, and I won't have it, and she hates him. I can't do anything ; I'm a dying man. I've had heart disease for years. I'm suffering agony now, and am liable to drop dead at any moment. It was foretold when I was born that I would die at sunrise, and——"

Suddenly the armless dummy gave a gasp, the pencil dropped from between his toes, and his face became deathly pale.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah ! the man is dying now !" cried the Unknown, springing to catch him as he reeled back in the stern of the boat.

"Dying ! He's already dead !" cried Edith.

"Look ! Look !" exclaimed Dick. "The sun is just rising ! The prophecy is fulfilled !"

It was so.

It had been growing lighter for some moments, and now the first rays of the rising sun showed themselves above the mountain tops.

The night had passed and in a few moments all nature would spring into the life of another day.

But there was to be no more life for the armless dummy.

He lay motionless in the arms of the Unknown.

Death had come with the rising sun.

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT THE MAN WHO ASKED AND ANSWERED QUESTIONS AND TRIED TO STEAL THE LAUNCH.

FOR some moments none of the passengers in the naphtha launch spoke a word.

They were overawed by what had happened, and no one felt like speaking until Young Klondike asked the momentous question :

"Is he really dead?"

"Dead as a door nail," replied the Unknown. "Ye gods and little fishes ! This is interesting business ! He knew what he was talking about. He died with the rising sun."

"You are sure?" asked Edith.

"Certainly I am. Didn't I study medicine two years ? Ain't I more than half a doctor ? Don't talk to me."

"I know you always call yourself a detective, but I never heard that you were a doctor before," said Ned,

"however, it don't surprise me to hear you say so, for you have claimed to be in every business under the sun."

"Have I ? Well, let me tell you, boys and Edith, I don't claim a bit more than belongs to me—oh, no."

"No use in getting up any argument," said Dick. "What are we going to do with this man ? That's the question now."

"Bury him," said the Unknown, briefly.

"And for the rest?"

"That remains for Young Klondike to decide."

"Well, for my part, I feel like carrying out his last wishes to the letter," said Ned. "He seemed to think we ought to go up French Gulch in order to find his daughter. We want to go up French Gulch, anyway. We are out on a prospecting tour and we might as well strike for the diggings he wrote about as any other. If it comes to a fight with those fellows who robbed him of his claim, we ought to be good for them. We've handled such people before, and I don't doubt that we can handle these."

"That's what," added Dick emphatically. "Ned always hits it right. I say, let's bust ahead on these lines and take everything just as it comes."

It was so agreed.

Meanwhile, the launch had been moving steadily forward.

The water was growing shallow. They had almost reached the point where they would be obliged to leave the launch and proceed on foot.

Here Young Klondike expected to meet four French miners, former workmen of his, who had been engaged to pack their belongings up into French Gulch and assist in prospecting.

As yet no sign had been seen of the Indian canoes, but this was not at all strange, as they had a good start, and the various delays would have given them plenty of time to reach the head waters of El Dorado Creek.

After some further conversation, it was determined to go ashore and bury the remains of the unfortunate Mr. McIntyre before pushing through to the entrance of French Gulch.

A convenient spot was chosen, and a fire built on the shore.

This was necessary if they wanted to dig the grave.

Up here in the Klondike country the ground is always frozen.

You can't dig more than a foot or so even in the middle of summer, without thawing it out.

It took two full hours to dig the grave.

Then Young Klondike and his friends reverently consigned the remains of the unfortunate man to their last resting place.

They flattened down the grave and placed a large stone over it to mark the place.

When all was finished they started the launch again, and a little before noon reached the headwaters of the creek at the entrance to French Gulch.

Here they found no trace of their Frenchmen, and

it was just the same as far as concerned the Indian canoes.

It was quite impossible that they could have proceeded further, for there was no longer water enough to float the launch let alone the heavily loaded baggage boat, and a hundred yards beyond El Dorado Creek was a mere stream issuing out of French Gulch.

Just what to do Young Klondike did not know.

He was prepared to leave the launch behind him, taking every chance of its being destroyed by the Indians or captured by some of the numerous bands of toughs which infest the neighborhood of the various Klondike diggings, but he did not like the idea of leaving the mining tools and provisions, which could not be replaced nearer than his own camp, far down the creek.

Still there seemed to be no help for it, if they desired to proceed; so the goods were carefully gone over, and such things as they wanted to pack themselves selected, and the rest buried in a cache, as it is called—that is, in a hole in the ground, marked so as to be easily identified later on.

It took time to burn out the hole and accomplish all this.

By the time the work was completed it was six o'clock. It had been a strange day, and one apparently spent to little purpose, although there was no telling what might grow out of it yet.

There were still several hours of daylight, and it was determined to improve them by traveling up French Gulch until darkness overtook them, but before they could get away from supper which Edith spread upon a table cloth on the bank of the creek, all sitting around it as comfortably as if there had been a table underneath, a man was seen coming out of French Gulch walking down over the rocks, carrying in his hand a cane so large that it might better be described as a club.

"Hello! Who in thunder is that? My man?" cried the Unknown, springing up.

"Hands off! Don't come the old game!" cried Ned.

To explain this it must be stated that the detective—for as far as the boys knew the Unknown was really a detective—claimed to have come to the Klondike in search of a certain mysterious criminal whom he always alluded to as his man.

The Unknown claimed to have followed this man all over the world, and from the astonishing stories he told it did seem as though he must have been in nearly every prominent city on the globe.

It was a great trick of the detective to suddenly pounce upon some luckless stranger and scare the life half out of him by declaring that at last he had found his man.

On such occasions he would first threaten to clap the handcuffs on him and then acknowledge his mistake and offer an humble apology.

Ned was therefore on the alert in an instant, for

he felt that the Unknown was about to try the same game now.

"It won't do," said Dick. "You keep quiet, Zed. We want to find out who this fellow is and what he knows."

"Who's going to hinder?" growled the detective. "I see now that he's not my man."

Just at that moment the stranger seemed to catch sight of them.

He stopped short, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked in the direction of the camp.

"Hello, there! Hello!" shouted Ned. "Come on down here, cap! You needn't be afraid!"

The stranger made no answer but seemed to be reassured, and striking his club hard against the rocks, he descended to where Young Klondike and his friends sat waiting for him.

"Good-evening, neighbor," said Ned, pleasantly. "Are you traveling down the creek?"

"That's what I am," replied the man, gruffly. "Say, boss, I'm hungry; have you got any grub to spare?"

"Plenty," replied Edith, before Ned could answer. "Sit right down. I'll help you to a good supper, my friend."

"Well, now, this is a rich strike," said the man, a half smile passing over his sinister face, "and to be served to supper by a pretty gal like you ought to make victuals taste all the sweeter—yes, that's so."

"You can keep your compliments to yourself," flashed Ned. "Let me tell you they ain't wanted here."

Now this was decidedly foolish of Young Klondike, for evidently the fellow knew no better than to make the remark.

He glared at Ned savagely, and there might have been trouble if the Unknown had not turned the subject with one of his chuckling laughs.

"Which way are you traveling, neighbor?" he asked.

"Well, now, I've just come down out of French Gulch," was the reply. "I'm a straight man, I am. I don't want no supper if I'm to be sat on like this."

"No one is going to sit on you," said Ned. "It's all right. Just stay where you are and we'll give you all you want to eat."

"Humph!" growled the man. "Well, now, I happen to be hungry, and so I accept of it. Wasn't for that I wouldn't do it—no!"

Edith now laid a substantial spread upon the table cloth, and the man began to eat.

"What's your name?" asked the Unknown.

"Well now, boss, my name is Dan Dunn," was the reply. "What's yours?"

There was a general laugh.

"Oh," said the detective, "I'm the great Unknown."

Mr. Dan Dunn threw down his knife and fork, highly offended.

"Are you making game of me again?" he asked, in a most surly tone.

"No, no; nothing of the sort," replied Ned. "Look here, Mr. Dunn, strange as it may seem to you, we don't know this gentleman's name, and so we call him the Unknown."

This was a fact, and it may seem even stranger to the reader than it did to Mr. Dan Dunn.

For some mysterious reason the detective had always refused to tell his name, and although he had come out to the Klondike with Ned Golden and Dick Luckey, they were still in ignorance of his name, and never called him anything but "Zed" or the "Unknown."

"Oh, that's it," said Mr. Dunn, beginning to eat again. "That's all right, then, boss; what is your name?"

"Joe McKinley," replied the detective, promptly. "I'm first cousin to the President of the United States."

"The deuce you are?"

"That's right."

"Humph! And who is the other fellow,"—pointing to Ned.

"Oh, my name is Ned Golden," laughed our hero. Dan Dunn looked up sharply.

"Of Golden & Luckey?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You're the fellow what's always called Young Klondike?"

"I am."

"Well, I've heard of you. That fellow there is Dick Luckey, your partner?"

"That's me," said Dick, laughing. "The whole firm is here."

"Then the lady must be Miss Edith Welton?"

"At your service," smiled Edith.

"Well, now, you've been serving me pretty danged well. Say, Young Klondike?"

"Say it."

"I've heard tell that you were worth two millions."

"Oh, people exaggerate my fortune."

"Don't believe it. You're worth big money all right."

"Perhaps."

"I've heard tell that you two were only a couple of poor clerks in New York before you came here—is that so?"

"Yes, it is."

"And that you met Miss Welton on the way up from Seattle. How's that?"

"That's so, also."

"That you rescued her from a wrecked steamer."

"You've hit it again."

"I've heard tell, too, that you always carry a detective round with you to protect you."

"So also, and I am the detective," chuckled the Unknown.

"Well, now, it's kinder strange that I should have run against you 'uns here," said Mr. Dunn moving away from the cloth, for he had now finished eating.

"Got any more questions you want to ask?" said the Unknown.

"No, I don't know as I have."

"Ask them freely if you want to," said Ned. "Don't be a bit bashful about it."

"Hain't got any, unless you've a mind to tell me which way you are traveling."

"We are going up French Gulch."

"You'd better be careful, there's a wild gang up there."

"We ain't afraid. I'd like to ask you a few questions though if you don't mind."

"Ask as many as you like; if I can answer them I will."

"Have you just come down French Gulch?"

"Yes, I have."

"Did you meet any Indians going up?"

Dan Dunn half shut his eyes and said:

"No."

"He's lying," thought the Unknown, but he did not speak.

"We have reason to believe that a band of Indians went up the gulch this morning. You are sure you didn't see them?" asked Ned.

"Dead sure!"

"Did you ever meet a man up there named McIntyre?"

"No."

"A dumb man without arms?"

"No."

"You don't seem to know much about the diggings up French Gulch?"

"I know as much as most. I've been working up there for some time back."

"You didn't see anything of four Frenchmen looking for me?"

"No."

"Perhaps if I was to tell you their names you might know them."

"Perhaps. Don't believe I should, though."

Young Klondike mentioned the names.

The answer was just the same—a decided no.

Ned saw that there was no use in trying to get anything out of the fellow.

He drew the Unknown aside, and said:

"He knows enough, but he won't tell it."

"That's what, dear boy."

"Can it be possible that he is one of the gang who stole poor old McIntyre's mine?"

"I wouldn't wonder a bit."

"How are we going to find it out?"

"We can't find it out. We can't do anything about it that I can see."

"Then what would you advise?"

"My advice would be just to go on about our business, but you can do just as you please."

"I didn't ask your advice just to reject it."

"That means you accept it?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll get ready to start."

"I think we'd better."

"And this man Dunn?"

"Let him go to blazes or any other seaport—I don't care!"

This conclusion was acted upon.

"We are going to move on now," said Young Klondike to Dan Dunn. "We wish you a pleasant journey down the creek."

The man replied gruffly, and taking his big stick, walked off without even saying good-by.

Soon afterward Young Klondike's party started.

They had scarcely gained the top of the rocky slope which marks the entrance to French Gulch when the Unknown, who chanced to look behind him, gave a sharp cry.

"What's the matter?" demanded Ned.

"Matter! Matter enough. Look there. Blamed if that snoozer ain't trying to steal the launch."

"Thunder! So he is!"

They could now see the place where the launch had been dragged up among the bushes plainly enough.

But the launch was no longer in the bushes.

It had been dragged back to the creek.

Moreover Mr. Dan Dunn was in it and seemed to be fussing with the naphtha engine, which he evidently did not understand.

"Ye gods and little fishes! That don't go!" cried the Unknown, dropping his pack on the ground.

"No, but we do!" exclaimed Ned, following his example. "We'll block that little game."

They left everything behind them but their rifles, and hurried back down the hill.

Before they had gone a dozen yards they were out of sight of the man and the launch.

This suited their purpose exactly, for they were able to steal up behind him, and concealed by the bushes watch what he was about.

It only needed one glance to know the truth.

Mr. Dan Dunn was about to start down the creek in the launch—just that and nothing more.

He had lighted the lamp and steam was pretty well up.

"Now, then," whispered the Unknown, and all four sprang out of the bushes and covered Mr. Dan Dunn with their rifles.

"Hold on, I surrender!" he cried, throwing up his hands.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah! that don't go!" said the Unknown. "My worthy friend, I'll trouble you to get out of that launch."

"What's the matter?" whined Dunn. "I found this thing here, and was only trying to see how it works. I didn't mean to steal it none."

"The deuce you didn't! Get out of that and come here!"

"But you'll shoot me! Gee whiz! I don't want to be shot!"

"We'll shoot you if you don't, so you'd better get out."

Dan Dunn sulkily obeyed.

"Stand up against that tree now and talk," said Ned, sternly. "You got answers to all your ques-

tions, and now I want answers to mine. I'm going to ask them over again."

Dunn obeyed. In fact, he couldn't very well help himself.

He felt that he was in danger of his life.

"Now, then, how about the Indians?" demanded Ned. "Speak right up! Did you see them at all?"

"No."

"He lies!" cried the Unknown. "Ask him again, Young Klondike, and fire unless he tells the truth!"

"Hold on! I cave, boss!" cried the man. "I did see the reds."

"I thought so! They had a girl prisoner with them?"

"Yes."

"McIntyre's daughter—you know McIntyre, of course? When you said you didn't it was a lie like the rest."

"Everybody knows dummy Mac," snarled Dunn, "but Kemush says he's dead."

"As you'll be if you don't scoot out of here right lively!" cried the Unknown. "Git! Vanish! Miz-zle! Make yourself scarce, or by the Jumping Jeremiah, I'll blow a hole through the top of your head!"

Mr. Dan Dunn did not wait for that interesting experiment to be made.

He plunged into the bushes the moment the rifles were lowered and was gone like a flash.

"Well, well! This is a great start!" cried Ned. "So we are on the right track after all."

"Takes the old detective to get at the truth," chuckled the Unknown. "Didn't I tell you he was lying, dear boy? Didn't I work him for all he was worth?"

"Well, now, you did," said Dick, "but say, where do you suppose he's gone now?"

"More than I can tell you; down the creek I suppose."

He thought so then, but he had reason to change his mind when they got to the top of the hill, after they had carefully stowed the launch away in another place, and paused to look back down to the creek.

They did not see him then, but when they looked up the Gulch there was Mr. Dan Dunn about a hundred yards away, running like a deer.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW YOUNG KLONDIKE AND HIS FRIENDS GOT INTO FOUR PROSPECTING PITS AND SCARED EIGHT INDIANS AWAY.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the Unknown, "that fellow has got the best of us after all."

"He's dodged around us, somehow," replied Ned, "but I don't just see how you figure it out that he has got the best of us for all that."

"Why, he's gone back to give the Indians warn-

ing that we are coming up the gulch—that's all."

"Think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"But his intention evidently was to go down the creek before."

"That's what," said Dick. "I don't just believe the Indian theory, though."

"Then what?" asked Ned.

"That he's one of the Patton gang, who stole the mine from old McIntyre. He took it into his head from our questions that we were going up to the McIntyre diggings, as we are, and when he found that he couldn't steal the launch he made up his mind to get square with us by giving the gang the tip on what we meant to do."

"Maybe so," said Young Klondike, "but for all that I ain't going to change my plans a bit."

Nobody thought of doing that, nor did they waste any time trying to overtake Mr. Dan Dunn, which indeed would have been quite useless, but pushed steadily on up the gulch until darkness overtook them, and picking out a suitable spot went into camp for the night.

Unnecessary to say, a sharp watch was kept up through the short hours of darkness.

Ned stood guard first, and then the Unknown took his turn.

When Ned woke up, a little before six, the detective was pacing up and down before the tent.

"Hello, Young Klondike! Awake at last?" he cried.

"Yes, and the first one up, too. Dick seems to be sleeping like a log."

"Oh, the poor fellow was up all the first part of last night, and didn't get much sleep the second part on account of the alarm."

"None of us did that."

"Yes, and that's right, too. But see here, I've been doing a little quiet prospecting on my own account since daylight came. Nothing like making hay while the sun shines and all the world is asleep."

"Well, what luck did you have?"

"I didn't find any big nuggets, but I did strike something pretty near that."

"And what?"

"Guess."

"Gold dust?"

"No."

"Not nuggets and not dust. I can't guess. I don't know what you can mean."

"How about prospect holes?"

"Hello! You're there, are you?"

"Ain't that next thing to nuggets—a place where somebody has been digging for them?"

"Well, perhaps. It shows that some fool has tried his luck on a most unpromising spot."

"Tried it four times."

"You mean there are four prospect holes?"

"Yes."

"And where?"

"Oh, about half a mile from here right on our way

up the gulch. They were all open and I had no trouble in examining them, but there don't seem to be the first living show of gold."

This did not surprise Ned at all, for there could hardly be a more unlikely place to start a diggings than here at the mouth of French Gulch.

After a comfortable breakfast they started along the rocky trail and met with an adventure right away.

Young Klondike was ahead and they had gone about a quarter of a mile, when looking up he saw a number of Indians in full war paint and feathers running down the steep slope further up the gulch.

"By gracious, look there!" he cried. "We are going to get ourselves into trouble now!"

"There's got to be some shooting done unless we can hide ourselves," said Edith coolly. "However, we ought to be good for that."

"So we ought, but loaded down as we are all the same I don't care to get into any muss unless we have to," said the detective. "Let's run on to my prospect holes."

"And for why?" asked Dick. "What good can that do?"

"What good? Why, we can hide—that's all, and give them a fine old scare when they come down."

They hurried on, losing sight of the Indians at once, owing to a sharp turn in the path.

"Have they gone?" asked Edith, not understanding why they had disappeared.

"No, no! They haven't gone at all. We'll soon see them again," said the Unknown. "Don't you fret yourself, they've been set on to us by Dunn, and don't mean to give it up so."

So they kept on till they came to the prospect holes.

These were four shallow pits between four and five feet deep, sunk a little to the left of the path.

"We'll drop right in there, and as they come along we'll pop up and let them have it," the Unknown said.

"Yes; and be nicely trapped if we don't happen to get the best of the fight," said Dick.

"Don't you fret! We are going to get the best of the fight—you'll see."

Ned was inclined to side with the Unknown, so they dropped their packs into the holes and followed themselves.

"Crouch low!" called the Unknown. "Don't let them see us on any account; let it be a complete surprise."

They now waited in anxious silence.

For a time nothing could be heard, but at last came the sound of soft, stealthy footsteps in the distance.

The Indians were creeping toward them with their moccasined feet.

Young Klondike projected his head out of the hole just far enough to be able to see up the path.

There were eight of the Indians.

They were peering about, evidently puzzled at the sudden disappearance of the party.

As each was armed with a rifle, Ned saw that it had to be sharp work to win the day.

He dodged down and waited for the signal which the Unknown was to give.

Suddenly it came—a peculiar low whistle.

Young Klondike knew that the Indians were within range.

Suddenly he popped up out of the prospect hole and raised his rifle, Dick, Edith and the Unknown doing the same, and all blazed away at the Indians, who started back, some running off up the gulch in their surprise.

CHAPTER V.

HOW YOUNG KLONDIKE RESCUED JENNIE McINTYRE FROM THE INDIANS.

"FIRE! Blaze away! By the Jumping Jeremiah, let them have it!" the Unknown bawled out.

It was hardly necessary for him to make so much noise about it as the Indians were already in full retreat.

The whole party scrambled out of the prospect holes, sending shot after shot after them.

What damage was done it was hard to tell at first, for the Indians promptly disappeared among the rocks further up the gulch, but after a little Young Klondike, who was ahead, came upon one who had fallen in the path and lay there abandoned by his companions.

At first they thought the buck was dead, but upon examination they discovered that he was still breathing.

The bullet seemed to have struck him on the head inflicting a scalp wound, glancing off without other damage than to temporarily stun him.

The buck was just recovering consciousness as they came up.

"No kill, boss, no kill!" he groaned.

Ned speedily disarmed him, and finding the fellow more scared than hurt ordered him to get on his feet.

The Indian obeyed, at the same time begging for his life.

He seemed to be a big coward, and quite different in that respect from the majority of his race.

"You speak English?" demanded Ned. "You understand me?"

"Oh, yes. Me speakee English," replied the Indian. "Me understand all you say."

"Who are you? One of the Indians who went down El Dorado Creek in canoes yesterday?"

"Ugh! Yes, boss; me Big Eagle. Me go down creek yesterday—oh, yes."

"I thought so. You and your friends took a white squaw out of the water, Big Eagle?"

"Yes, boss; dat so."

"We want her; where is she now?"

The Indian shook his head and pretended not to understand.

"Oh, it won't do you any good to try to crawl out of it," said Ned sternly. "You know where she is, Big Eagle. You must tell."

He made a sign to the others and they covered the Indian with their rifles.

"Now tell! Tell or I say fire!" cried Ned. "Tell Big Eagle, tell!"

"Wait, boss. Dat not my business. Dat Kemush business."

"Never mind Kemush. We know all about him. He took the girl and means to carry her away up the gulch and give her to Joe Patton. We won't let him. Tell where she is or you die."

Big Eagle held up his hand imploringly.

"Yes, yes. I tell!" he exclaimed. "White boy no kill. Me show him girl—come!"

"You mean that you will take me to the place where she is now?" asked Ned.

Big Eagle nodded.

"Is it far?"

Not far, it appeared, according to Big Eagle. He pointed up on the rocks.

"Don't think of going," said the Unknown. "It would be as much as your life is worth."

Perhaps Ned might have hesitated if the Unknown had not said this.

But the moment the words were spoken he accepted them as a challenge, and determined to go at any cost.

"I'm going!" he declared, "but I don't want any one to go with me. You all stay behind and mind the traps."

Dick and Edith broke out into a storm of objection. The more they objected the more resolved Ned grew.

"I'm going, and that's all there is about it," he declared; "now, then, I just don't want to hear any more."

"Well, if you are going, then I'm going too," said Dick.

"We'll all go," declared the Unknown. "I ain't going to see Ned go alone."

But Ned wouldn't have that either, so they compromised on Dick, and it was agreed that Edith and the Unknown should stay behind and mind the goods.

Big Eagle stood listening to all this in grim silence.

As soon as they had started he turned to Ned and patted him on the shoulder, saying:

"Good white boy! Good! Give back Big Eagle him rifle. White boy shall have squaw—oh, yes."

"Thank you, Big Eagle," said Ned quietly. "You do this for me and I'll give you back your rifle and two more beside, any time you will call at the Young Klondike mine down on El Dorado Creek."

Big Eagle looked wonderfully pleased. He seemed to understand the situation perfectly.

"You Young Klondike?" he asked. "Dat your name?"

"That's who I am."

"Huh! Dat good. Young Klondike good to Indians. No come down to fight if we know."

"Who sent you down to fight us, Big Eagle?" Ned asked.

"White man tell us you come. Say you bad man, dat you kill Indians, and make much trouble—oh, yes."

"You know this white man's name, Big Eagle?"

"Oh, yes. Him name Dunn. Dat right?"

"That's the man. He lies. We are the Indians' friends always."

"Every time we are if they use us right, and you can bet on it," put in Dick.

This seemed to please Big Eagle. In fact they had completely won him over to their side, and Ned sealed the compact by stopping at a little stream and dressing the buck's wounded head.

The Indian was very grateful and promised every assistance in helping out in the errand of mercy on which they were bound.

He led the way up the gulch for some little distance, turning off on a side path which took them in among the ledges.

Here they were completely at the mercy of any Indian who might be higher up on the rocks.

Naturally Ned felt nervous and he grasped his rifle firmly, keeping an eye out for everything as they advanced.

Big Eagle saw through this and laughed in his gruff way.

"You need not be afraid, Klondike boy," he said.

"Me swear that no harm shall come to you."

"I trust you fully, Big Eagle," replied Ned. "Take us where you like. Have we much further to go?"

"Not far."

"How far?"

"Only a few steps. See those rocks?"

"Up there?"

"Yes. Indian camp dere."

"We're getting hot on the trail," said Dick. "By gracious, Ned, if this fellow goes back on us he needn't expect much mercy from me."

"He won't," said Ned. "We are perfectly safe. I have the strongest sort of an idea that we are going to succeed."

Dick's reply was that he hoped so, and Big Eagle led the way up the rocks.

When they got near the top he made the boys crouch down, and showed them a number of wicky-ups down in a hollow.

There were squaws moving about and little children playing around.

"Dat de place!" he said. "Big Eagle go down first. See dat wicky-up there against the rocks?"

He pointed to the nearest lodge of the group, which backed up against the rocks at no great distance down from where they lay crouching.

"I see," replied Ned. "Is the girl in there?"

"Yes, boss. Dat's de place. Me go down first. Me let her out—you must be behind the lodge and do the rest."

"Will there be a fight?" asked Dick. "Are there many Indians in the camp?"

"Heap many. All asleep. No sleep many nights, so all asleep now."

"And if they attack us, what then?" asked Dick.

Big Eagle shrugged his shoulders.

"Me no know," he replied. "Klondike boys have to fight den. Me set girl free, me no can do more."

"Of course he can't do any more without running the risk of being killed by his friends," said Ned. "I see that plain enough. Go on Big Eagle. You set the girl free and tell her to come out of the tent on the side nearest the rocks, and we will do the rest."

It was rather a doubtful bargain certainly, but Young Klondike never faltered, and as for Dick, wherever Ned was willing to go he stood ready to go too.

They waited to give Big Eagle a chance to get down into the Indian village.

Looking down from their elevated position they saw him join the group of squaws who came running out of the lodges to meet him.

There were no bucks present that they could see.

"This is our time," Ned whispered. "We want to slide down behind the last lodge while the attention of the Indians is engaged."

"You think it's safe?" asked Dick.

"As safe now as it ever will be. Come on. Every minute we waste is so much against us. Even if worse comes to worse, I'm sure I can hold my own."

They crept down the hill, keeping as close to the ground as possible.

There were many boulders scattered about on the side of the hill, and this helped them too.

In a moment they came in behind the Indian lodge, or wicky-up, a big tent made of poles, covered with skin. It was one of the most substantial in the village, and probably the safest of all to keep a prisoner in.

Once they gained their position, the boys crouched down behind the lodge and listened.

All they could hear was the shouts of the children and the chatter of the squaws. There did not seem to be any one near the lodge, and they could hear no sound from within.

"Look here, Dick, I'll be blest if I'm going to wait for Big Eagle to act," whispered Young Klondike. "I'm going right in there after that girl now."

"I've nothing to say," answered Dick. "It seems to be quiet enough inside."

"There ain't a sound. If the girl is actually there, this is our chance. After all, Big Eagle may mean to go back on us, one can't tell."

"We'll make the start then. What shall I do?"

"Lie perfectly still and watch. At the first alarm give me the call. I'm going in the lodge."

Ned crawled nearer and cautiously raised the skin, peering into the lodge.

His heart gave a quick beat of satisfaction as he saw that the interior was deserted save for a young girl who lay upon a handsome bearskin, bound hand and foot with raw hide thongs.

It took Ned just one second to reach her side.

The girl started violently as he bent over her—evidently she had been asleep.

"Hush! Don't say a word! Don't make a sound!" breathed Ned. "I've come to save you."

A low whistle from Dick took his attention from the girl's grateful reply.

"I'm your friend—I'll see you safe out of this," whispered Ned. "The Indians are coming—it has got to be done now!"

Quick as thought he whipped out his knife and cut the thongs.

The girl sprang to her feet. It needed none of Ned's help to get her out of the lodge.

Dick pulled the flap up high and met them outside. "The bucks have come around Big Eagle," he whispered. "I don't believe he can help us now even if he tries."

Suddenly a wild yell went up from among the lodges.

The cause was plain enough. Young Klondike, Dick and the girl had been discovered as they started up the hill.

A shower of rifle shots and arrows came flying their way, and the Indian village resounded with horrible yells as the bucks started in pursuit.

"Run for your life!" cried Ned, releasing his hold on the girl's arm.

Then he and Dick flung up their Winchesters and fired six rounds each.

Twelve effective shots they must have been and no mistake, for several bucks tumbled over wounded.

Whether Big Eagle was among them or not Young Klondike could not tell, for he and Dick ran after the girl for all they were worth.

In a moment they joined her on the ridge, and all then went running at full speed down on the other side.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW YOUNG KLONDIKE STRUCK A NEW BONANZA IN THE OLD PROSPECT HOLES.

"HOORAY for Young Klondike! Three cheers! Hip! Hip! Hooray!"

This was the greeting Ned Golden got when he and Dick came escorting Miss Jennie McIntyre into camp.

It was the Unknown who did the shouting, and he and Edith ran forward to greet him.

Edith received the afflicted girl with all the tenderness of a sister.

Poor Jennie was much affected on her father's account, for Ned had told her all.

"You did it! By the Jumping Jeremiah, you did it!" cried the Unknown. "Ye gods and little fishes! I'll be hanged if you ain't the smartest fellow that ever was!" he added. "There's nothing you undertake to do that don't succeed; but what about the Indians? Are they coming down upon us like a thousand of brick?"

"I've just been telling Mr. Golden that I think the safest thing you all can do is to stay right where you are," said Jennie McIntyre. "These Indians are on the move up the gulch. They are going to attack the gold diggers who drove poor father and me away from our claim. You see they've had a quarrel, and Joe Patton killed the son of the chief. They captured me because they wanted to revenge themselves on Patton, and knew that they could do it better through me than any other way. You see he has been paying attention to me for some time back, but I'd rather die than become his wife."

"Then your idea is that we'd better hold back until all this trouble blows over?" asked the Unknown.

"Decidedly. Of course you will do as you please; as for me, I must try to make my way to Dawson City. Once I get there I'm all right, for father left a hundred thousand dollars in the bank last time we went down."

"A mighty snug sum to fall back on, too," said Ned. "I don't want to urge you, Miss McIntyre, but I think you had better not try it alone. Stay with us and share what we have. We are out on a little prospecting tour and shall be returning to Dawson before a great while."

"Yes, do stay," said Edith, adding her entreaties to Ned's suggestion. "We can't very well go now, and I should just hate to see you start off alone."

It was finally decided that the girl should stay with them and that the whole party should remain where they were for twenty-four hours at least.

"By that time I shall be able to learn something about the movements of the Indians," declared the Unknown. "I'm going to start right off now and when I come back you may rest assured that I shall have something to tell."

Now there was no sort of use trying to stop the Unknown once he made up his mind to go off on one of these trips.

You might just as well try to stop the wind from blowing, and Young Klondike did not try.

Moreover, he was anxious to know what move the Indians were likely to make, and it seemed only right that the Unknown should take his turn.

So the detective started off, leaving the rest to make themselves as comfortable as possible until his return.

Ned had a long talk with Jennie McIntyre, in which Dick and Edith joined.

They soon discovered that the girl came from a very respectable San Francisco family, and that she and Edith had many acquaintances in common.

It was almost like meeting an old friend for Edith to fall in with her.

As there seemed likely to be no end to their conversation, Ned and Dick pulled out and began to look around the gulch a bit.

"I wonder who it ever could have been that dug these prospect holes," mused Ned, as they walked toward the place where they had the brush with the Indians.

"He must have been a fool whoever he was," replied Dick.

Young Klondike laughed.

"Now, you are quoting me," he said. "I suppose it's all right to throw a fellow's words back in his teeth, but the fact is I've changed my mind about that matter. I don't think the same about it that I did before."

"Hello! That so?"

"That's what's the matter."

"And why?"

"Well, you see I've looked into the matter a little more closely as we've been moving around here, and I see the thing in another light."

"Which means that you now think this is not such a bad place for prospecting after all?"

"Exactly."

"How do you figure it?"

"Look at the gulch, Dick. Don't you see that at one time this must have been the bed of an immense river?"

"It does look so."

"This stream and El Dorado Creek are all there is left of it. Now, then, where I made my mistake was in thinking that the gulch was just a break in the rocks, caused by an earthquake or some other natural convulsion. I see my mistake now. It's nothing but an old river bed. There must have been washing done here on an immense scale in some time long passed. Of course, whatever gold was in the hills here on either side came down into the bed of the old river. Lots of it, no doubt, was swept down into the valley of El Dorado Creek where the river had more of a spread, but very likely a great deal of gold remained here lodging in this old bottom. Yes, I see it in its proper light now, or at least I think so, and I don't wonder the prospectors tried their hands here."

"What's the matter with us taking a hand in and seeing what luck we have in the holes?" asked Dick.

"Just exactly what I was about to propose," replied Ned. "While Edith and Jennie McIntyre are talking we might as well go right at it. We've got to put in time somehow, and prospecting is decidedly in our line."

"That's what. Shall we pitch in and get the tools?"

"A couple of picks and spades will do to start with. I have an idea that the recent rains have softened up the ground in the prospect holes, and that we may not have to burn them out after all."

It was decided to go ahead and make the attempt.

Ned went for the tools, and Dick dropped down into one hole after the other to take a survey.

"I think this one will be the easiest worked!" he called up to Ned, as the latter came back loaded down with picks and shovels.

"That was the one the Unknown hid in, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"And why do you choose it?"

"Ground is softer."

"How's the ground in the rest?"

"Well, it's frozen in the one I was in, but it is comparatively soft in all the rest."

"That will do me all right then. We can work two of them."

"Oh, we'd better work together, hadn't we?"

"What's the use in both of us chasing the same dog?"

"None, I suppose. I hope Edith will keep a sharp lookout for the Indians while we are working, for we can't see a thing down in the holes."

"You bet Jennie McIntyre will."

"She takes her father's death pretty easy, Ned, don't you think so?"

"Well, she didn't at first. Don't you remember how she cried when I told her about it?"

"Yes, but she soon got over it."

"Oh, girls don't always show all they feel. You can never tell about them."

Ned threw down a pick and spade into the prospect hole where he had hidden, and jumped down after them, while Dick returned to his choice, the Unknown's.

The earth was comparatively soft down for a foot or two, and then Young Klondike struck frost.

"How is it with you, Dick?" he shouted. "I've run against a snag."

"Frost?" bawled Dick. It was hard to hear each other down in the holes.

"Yes, frost."

"Bad job. I haven't struck it yet. Told you this was the best place."

Young Klondike worked on, determined not to be deterred by the frost as long as there was any chance to dig.

He took the pick and hammered away at the frozen earth, loosening a little of it, but it was hard work.

"It will have to be burned out," he thought, "and how to do it I can't imagine, for there ain't a sign of wood around here."

Once more he drove the pick into the earth—drove it in good and deep, and then pried up on it.

The pick stuck—it came hard—Ned thought he should never be able to loosen it, when all at once up it came with a rush.

Ned tumbled over against the opposite wall of the pit.

"By gracious, I got a good lump out that time!" he muttered. "Maybe it's softer underneath. I'll tackle it again. I—hello! Hello!"

Young Klondike stood staring at the break and rubbing his eyes.

The whole surface of the ground underneath the clod he had raised was of a dull yellow line.

"Gold! Gold!" he exclaimed, and then down he dropped on his knees beside the pit.

You see it was just the same with Young Klondike as with everyone else who catches the gold fever. He never could get used to the excitement of a new strike.

"It's gold sure, and a thundering lot of it. Nuggets, by Jove! A perfect nest of them. Well, well, well!" he went on to say.

Now nuggets don't hold the frost like sand and earth. Ned had no difficulty in scooping up a hatful.

They ran pretty well to size. Many were as big as a robin's egg, which, be it understood, is a pretty good sized nugget; others were smaller and ran down to the size of peas and even smaller still.

"No use talking, this is a big strike," said Ned to himself and then shouted: "Dick! Oh, Dick!"

"Hello!" cried Dick, from his hole.

"How are you making out?"

"I'm done?"

"How done?"

"Well done—clean done. I've run up against the frost."

"And I've run up against another snag."

"Hello! Thought you struck frost once. I've been waiting, expecting to see you come up out of there. What snag is it now?"

"A bed of nuggets so thick that I don't believe I could work through it before dark!"

At this startling announcement, Dick gave a shout that very closely resembled a war-whoop, and lost no time in scrambling out of his hole and down into Ned's.

"Well, it beats the band what luck we have!" he exclaimed. "Young Klondike's New Bonanza! Hooray! Hooray!"

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE GOLD DIGGERS CAME DOWN FRENCH GULCH AND PLANNED AN ATTACK ON THE CAMP.

"THAT'S the name."

Ned leaned back against the wall of the pit and laughed as he pronounced these words.

"What's the name?" demanded Dick, still staring at the gold.

"What you just said."

"Young Klondike's New Bonanza?"

"Yes."

"And a very good name it is. I'll bet the stock will sell like hot cakes if you ever put it on the market down at Dawson."

"It will never go on the market if it turns out to be half as rich as I think it's going to be," said Ned.

"But let's get at it and try our luck. I'd like to see how the blame thing will pan out as far as we can go just now."

"Shan't we call Edith?"

"No, what's the good? She's happy, so there's no use in disturbing her. We'll bust right ahead and see what we find."

"I should say we'd found it already as far as I'm any judge. How does she dig?"

Dick took up the pick and tackled the nuggets. Just as Ned discovered, he found they detached themselves from each other easily enough.

"Why, there's no trouble at all in working it," he exclaimed. "The frost don't seem to have lodged here a bit."

"Nothing for it to hold on to. We shan't need any fire as long as we have the nugget bed to dig through?"

"And may it last forever!" cried Dick. "Here goes! We've got to clear a larger space."

This was not hard work, now that the ice had once been broken, so to speak.

In a little while they had the whole bottom of the shaft cleared, and found themselves standing on gold as they worked.

Then came the pleasant task of scooping out the nuggets.

None were very large, but the quantity in sight was enormous, and it was entirely certain that the bed extended for a considerable distance on either side of the pit.

After they had loosened quite a pile Dick went up to get a bucket so that a little hoisting might be done.

Edith and Jennie McIntyre were still talking and comparing notes about old times in San Francisco.

"How are you and Ned making out, Dick?" Edith asked.

"First rate, as far as digging goes. We are going to hoisting now."

"Any luck?"

"Why, we've just got the ground loosened up a bit. It's hard to say how it will pan out."

"Do you need any help?"

"Not a bit. Ned and I can manage it all right. You haven't seen anything of the Indians, have you?"

"No, thank Heaven, and I don't want to. If I had my wish we'd never see anything of them again."

Most devoutly did Dick hope that Edith might have her wish as he returned to the shaft.

"I'll be down in a few minutes and see how we are getting along," called Edith, but it was nearly an hour before she came.

Meanwhile Ned had been picking and Dick hoisting for all he was worth.

The result was a big pile of nuggets.

Dick, seeing Edith coming, threw an old tarpaulin over them which had been wrapped around the tools.

"Well, I don't see that you boys have done much here," remarked Edith as she approached.

"That's right—we haven't, but we expect to just the same," answered Dick.

"Thought Ned didn't consider this ground good for anything."

"He's changed his mind."

"Then you have struck something after all. Dick, you are fooling me."

"Look and see what we've struck," replied Dick, suddenly pulling the tarpaulin off the heap of gold.

"Ah! You're there, are you?" cried Edith. "I thought so. I knew you'd never stay here so long unless something worth while was going on!"

At this moment Ned called out from the shaft for Edith to look down, and the full story of the new bonanza was made plain.

While they were still talking about it there was a slight sound heard on the rocks overhead.

"Look! Look!" breathed Dick. "There's a shot for you, Edith."

It was a big brown bear looking down over the rocks.

He seemed to be very curious about the Klondikers down in the gulch, for he kept his gaze fixed upon them and did not move.

"I can get him," whispered Edith. "Let me have your rifle, Dick. Mine is back at the camp."

Dick handed her the rifle, but before Edith could fire a shot rang out, and they saw the bear rise on its haunches.

It made a violent effort to turn and run, but failed in the attempt and tumbled over sideways, whirling down the rocks and landing almost at Edith's feet.

It was very startling.

All stood motionless, listening, wondering what was coming next, when all at once there was a shout, and the Unknown came running to the edge of the rocks.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, that's my work!" he cried. "I did it that time! Bear steaks for dinner! If I keep on I shall be almost as good a shot as Edith herself."

He came running down the rocks with the smoking rifle in his hand.

Ned climbed out of the prospect hole, and was there ready to meet him.

"What about the Indians?" he demanded. "You are back sooner than you thought."

"All gone, dear boy! There ain't a trace of them! Ye gods and little fishes, they are like the Arabs; they have folded their tents and silently stolen away."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do! They are all gone; every mother's son of them!"

"Gone where, do you suppose?"

"Up French Gulch, to tell the gold diggers what we are about. We may expect trouble. I hardly think it's going to pay us to go any further, dear boy."

"I'm very sure of it and I ain't going," said Ned, quietly.

The tarpaulin had been thrown over the nugget pile again.

"Hello! You give in mighty easy, it seems to me. It ain't like you a bit to do that, Young Klondike."

They all laughed. So intent had the Unknown been on his own business that he had not noticed the tarpaulin yet.

"What you laughing at?" demanded the detective.

"At you," replied Dick.

"And why at me? What have I done to be laughed at, I'd like to know?"

"You've stolen something," said Edith, laughing heartier than ever.

"Stolen something! What?"

"My shot. I'd have had that bear in one second if you had let him alone."

"Oh, bother! Haven't I a right to pick up a shot when I see one? But what are you doing up here anyhow? Why ain't you down at the camp?"

"We'll go now," said Ned. "Would you mind carrying down that tarpaulin? Dick and I will drag the bear."

"Certainly not," said the Unknown, who was the most obliging fellow on earth. He seized the tarpaulin, starting back with a great cry when he saw the pile of gold underneath.

Ned and all hands shouted, and the joke on the Unknown would have been a complete success if it had not had an unexpected termination.

In jumping back the detective jumped too far, stumbled and fell into the prospect hole before anyone could put out a hand to help him.

It might have been very serious, but it wasn't, and when Ned and Dick jumped to the rescue expecting to find him with a broken leg or arm, there was the Unknown dancing a jig on the precious nuggets, and calling out about the gold.

"A new bonanza! By the Jumping Jeremiah, a new bonanza!" he cried. "Ye gods and little fishes, it's the richest one yet!" And when he said this the Unknown only stated the truth.

For two full weeks Young Klondike and his friends remained there in French Gulch working the "New Bonanza," for the name which both Ned and the Unknown gave to the great discovery was the one adopted for it in the end.

The second day the four Fenchmen came down the gulch.

They had been delayed by some trivial occurrence, but were all ready to go to work now.

Young Klondike questioned them closely.

Their report was that all the regular mines in the gulch which lay about ten miles further up were doing well.

They had seen nothing of the Indians and had no report to make about poor old Michael McIntyre's diggings, although they had heard of them and were aware that a large party of toughs had jumped these claims and driven the old man and his daughter off.

"We shall let them go," declared Ned when they all met to talk over the situation that night. "If they don't bother us I'm sure we won't bother them. That's the programme. The New Bonanza is rich, and we'll stay and work it. If the gang comes we'll defend our rights to the last."

Next morning work began in earnest.

Ned, who had made a careful survey of the ground, determined to sink on all four of the prospect holes at once.

"Because," he explained, "my idea of it is that this deposit extends all over the flats here. It's a great sheet of gold, so to speak. It may dip here and there, and probably does. One can't tell just where we are going to strike it, but strike it we surely shall wherever we dig inside the walls, if we only go deep enough down."

Now, by the walls, Young Klondike referred to the high rocky inclosure which almost entirely surrounded them, split in two by the gulch through which the stream ran.

If he was right, it meant that there was gold on both sides of the creek, and if that was so then they had ground of about two square miles in extent to work on.

Only trouble was that it had undoubtedly been located by somebody before.

This, however, did not prevent Young Klondike and his friends from working it.

That he had a right to do under the law since it had been abandoned, but he must pay a certain tax to the rightful owner, if he should happen to put in a claim.

Then if he chose he could jump the abandoned claim.

Under certain conditions he would be able to hold it, if he did this; under certain others not.

But Young Klondike knew the mining law as well as anyone, and was perfectly well aware of what he was about.

"We'll work out all we conveniently can, and then ship down to Dawson City, and see what can be done about permanently locating the claim," he declared. "I don't believe we are going to have any trouble in holding it. Evidently it has been abandoned a long time."

So the work went on, and we must still hold back the story a bit to describe the results.

For the first few days Ned and his friends worked on the original shaft, which they dubbed "Old No. 1!"

They soon made an unpleasant discovery.

The gold deposit was very thin, not more than a foot in depth, and after they passed through it they struck sand and then gravel, paying about twenty dollars to the pan.

This was good enough for ordinary working—in fact, it would have been considered quite a bonanza by some.

But Young Klondike had more to think about and did not work far below the nugget deposit, but turned his attention to cleaning up the bottom of the shaft and drifting into the sides a little here and there.

The nugget bed continued on all sides.

As old No. 1 was a middle shaft and there were

prospect holes on both sides of it, Ned now turned his attention to them.

That was the day the Frenchmen arrived.

The first job Young Klondike gave them to do was to go back to the cache and unearth the remainder of the goods, and when the balance of the tools came up all hands went to work on the prospect holes.

Everything went swimmingly from that moment.

No. 2 was burned out and worked down to the level of the gold deposit.

It proved to be just as rich as No. 1, and in Nos. 3 and 4 it was just the same.

At the end of two weeks there was a good prospect that the New Bonanza would become a permanent camp.

A council of war was now held, and it was determined that Dick should go down El Dorado Creek to the Young Klondike mine and bring up a load of provisions and a portable house which had been purchased in Dawson some time before and not used.

Orders were sent for five more men to come up and lend a hand, and in due time Dick was back and the hut was put in place and a force of nine men were working in the mine.

New Bonanza camp now became a scene of busy action.

Of course the news of the rich discovery spread. It could hardly be otherwise, for the location was directly on the regular trail from El Dorado to French Gulch, and prospectors and others were constantly passing up and down.

Consequence was that the New Bonanzaites were favored with many visitors.

The Unknown took charge of these.

He constituted himself guard in ordinary and kept parading up and down the gulch.

Every inquirer who came was received civilly, but no one was allowed to go down into the prospect holes or to examine into the working of the mine in any way.

For this there was a good reason. At the end of the first week a party came down the gulch and among them was Ben Challifoux, an old French prospector, whom Young Klondike knew perfectly well.

"Hello! So you've started up Joe Patton's old prospect hole," was his first greeting to Ned.

Young Klondike immediately called him to one side and began questioning him.

"Do you mean to tell me that Joe Patton started these holes?" he asked.

"That's what he did," replied old Ben. "He worked here three years ago, but *ma foi*, that goes for nothing, Young Klondike. He has dug prospect holes in forty places. I do not believe he has any real claim to this land."

This was all that Ben Challifoux had to tell, but it was enough to make Ned feel both relieved and disturbed.

Relieved because he now felt reasonably sure that he had a good claim to the diggings; disturbed, be-

cause he saw that he might expect trouble from the Patton gang at any time.

Then after old Ben Challifoux's party passed on down the gulch, others came and told the same story.

Ned saw that it was Joe Patton whom he had to fear; he had heard of this person before the armless dummy told him of his doings up at the head of the gulch, and knew him to be a bold, bad man.

So much for the situation at the New Bonanza on the night when the great rain storm set in.

The storm, which had been brewing all day, came upon them just before seven o'clock.

It began to rain then as it can rain only in the Klondike country.

First, a few great drops and a rush of wind, and then a vast downpour which, judging from the experience of the past, Ned knew might last for days.

At half past seven the Unknown, who had been up the creek exploring, came running in wet to the skin, and in anything but a pleasant frame of mind.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is beastly!" he exclaimed. "It's set in for a regular old timer. I wouldn't wonder a bit if the creek rose so as to send the water into our house."

"Hope not," replied Ned, who was eating supper. "Don't worry about it. Go change your clothes and then come and sit down with us and have a bite."

The hut was divided into two rooms down-stairs, with a little lean-to kitchen behind, and a loft for the accommodation of Edith and Jennie McIntyre above.

In this room were Ned, Dick and the two ladies eating supper, in the other the workmen were engaged in the same agreeable occupation.

The two apartments were entirely disconnected from each other, so Young Klondike and his friends were able to make themselves as much at home as though they had been the sole occupants of the house.

The Unknown now retired to the kitchen, changed his clothes and came in to supper.

"I've made a discovery at last," he said. "There has been someone prowling about here to-day."

"How do you know?" asked Ned.

"Oh, for several reasons. First, I saw the remains of a fresh fire further up the gulch late this afternoon. That started me going, and I've been wandering round among the hills until the rain caught me. I struck the trail two or three times, but I couldn't strike the man."

"Do you think there was more than one man?"

"Shouldn't want to be sure, but if you ask me my opinion, I say I don't think there was."

"I'm afraid it is one of Joe Patton's spies," said Jennie. "I've been expecting this. If there is trouble coming on my account I shall wish that I had gone down the creek at the start."

"Don't you say such a word," replied Ned, quickly, "isn't all our good luck due to you?"

"Yes, and what luck it is," said the Unknown, with his mouth full. "Ye gods and little fishes, it's immense! Leave us! Never! We'll fight for you to the bitter end."

"Of course Jennie mustn't think of going," said Edith. "We don't do business that way—do we, Ned?"

"Well, I guess not," replied Ned. "We may take to it some of these days, but we haven't done it yet."

"How much have we on hand now, dear boy?" asked the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, I wish we'd sent it all down to the Young Klondike mine yesterday. We talked of doing that, you know."

"There is considerably over three hundred thousand dollars, as near as I can reckon it," replied Ned. "By the end of the week we ought to be able to clean up half a million; then we'll strike for Dawson City and bank it, leaving the New Bonanza under guard till we can get back."

It kept right on raining all the evening, and really it was surprising what an amount of water fell.

At eleven o'clock when darkness set in the stream which runs down through French Gulch, emptying into El Dorado Creek, had become so swollen that it was almost as wide as the creek itself. It would not take much more to send it up around the hut—that Young Klondike plainly saw when just as darkness came he stepped outside the hut to have a look.

But what Young Klondike did not see was a man standing in front of a great projecting ledge about half a mile further up the gulch. He did not see this man for the very excellent reason that he was entirely beyond his range of vision, owing to the windings of the stream.

Now if Young Klondike's eyes had been able to see around several corners and could have reached this spot, he would have perceived that this man was attentively studying the weather and evidently trying to form some idea about the chances of the rain continuing to fall through the night.

"Hello, Jack!" he called, looking back under the ledge which formed a sort of shallow cave. "Come out here!"

"What's up now, Joe?" growled a voice from under the rocks. "Do you mean to go out in all this rain?"

There were fully twenty men in that cave, if cave it could be called. They were lying sprawled out around the remains of a fire and for the most part seemed to be asleep, although one or two lay on their backs smoking and staring up at the rocks overhead.

The one addressed was a great hulking prospector with big boots, red shirt and slouch hat.

He came out into the rain and joined his companion, looking anything but pleased over the prospect of making a move.

"We'd better hang out here till morning, Joe," he said.

"Which means another day," replied the man. "Of course we can't make the attack in the light."

"I don't know why not. We ought to be good for them whatever time we choose to make the attack."

"Now, now, now! Look here, Jack West, I

haven't brought my gang of gold diggers down French Gulch for nothing. I'm out for business. Young Klondike has started up work on my old diggings and strikes it rich where I failed, just as he does on every other feller's dead diggings. That chap is a wonder, he is."

"It's because he's got a lucky man with him," growled Jack West. "That's what's the matter. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Gosh! Is that meant for a joke, Jack West?"

"Well, I kinder intended it that way."

"And did you think it was funny?"

"Well, I sorter had that idea when I laughed."

"Gosh! That's a good one! Well, I'll make you laugh when you see the result of my work. 'Let's go and drive Young Klondike's gang out right now,' says you; very well, and what did I say? 'Yes,' like a blame fool? No! I said 'let's wait; let's give him time to do his digging and get something out that's worth having, and then we'll jump in on him, capture the girl, scoop in the dust, and do up Young Klondike all at the same time.' Now, then, Jack West, that's my plan, and right to-night, in the rain, I'm going to carry it out!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THERE WAS TROUBLE AT THE HUT, AND JENNIE AND EDITH WERE CAPTURED AND THE PATTON GANG GOT OFF WITH THE GOLD.

It rained harder than ever toward midnight; at least Young Klondike thought so and he was the one who was on the watch at the hut.

Everybody else was sound asleep, for one guard was considered all that was necessary, and it was part of the policy of the mine not to trust any of the workmen to do this.

Ned went out about midnight to take a survey of the situation and see how the storm was coming on.

It did not take him long to find out that the rain was coming down harder than ever. He saw also that the stream had risen above its banks and was now rapidly making its way toward the hut.

"There is going to be trouble here," he thought. "I'd better get Dick and the Unknown up. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if the hut was washed away."

Naturally Ned thought about the gold at that time.

It was buried in a shallow pit dug underneath the hut.

Of course all the workmen knew where it was.

This thought worried Young Klondike also.

In case of trouble he was afraid the Frenchmen might make a rush for the gold and escape with all they could lay their hands on.

Such things had happened before and were liable to happen again.

Ned's idea just then was to open the hiding hole and in spite of the rain carry the gold up among the hills and hide it there where it would be safe in case the trouble came.

Now, sure enough, trouble was close upon Young Klondike, but it was not exactly of the kind he looked for.

It would have been better if he had gone back inside the hut then and waited, for sharp eyes were upon him. Several men crouching among the rocks were watching his movements, and the principal thought of these men was to get their hands on the gold.

They were the Joe Patton gang of gold diggers from up French Gulch, and it is safe to say that if you searched the Klondike country far and wide it would be difficult to find a worse gang than this.

But Ned did not go back to the hut.

As ill-luck would have it, he was at that moment seized with another idea.

It struck him that the water might be running into the prospect holes which were a good deal nearer the bank of the stream than the hut, and he determined to go and see.

He hurried along to Old No. 1. The water was not in it yet but it had come up very close, and there seemed every chance that the hole would fill up in a short time.

Ned gathered up the tools and tossed them on higher ground for safety.

There were a few things down in the bottom of the hole which had been carelessly left there and overlooked when the rain came on, and he dropped down into it to toss them out, and was thus engaged when all of a sudden he heard a slight noise overhead.

It was a footstep. Someone was coming. Young Klondike seized the rope which hung suspended from the windlass and pulled himself out.

No sooner had his feet touched the ground than he knew that the anticipated trouble had come.

Four men suddenly sprang up from behind the dump and seized him.

One caught one arm, another seized him on the other side, the third grasped his throat and the fourth covered him with a revolver. It was a startling situation and a serious one.

Ned was not given the least chance to defend himself. He stood there a prisoner staring in the face of the man who had seized him by the throat, which was pressed close to his.

"We want you, Young Klondike," hissed the man. "We've been laying for you this long time, and by gracious, we've got you! You're our prisoner now!"

"So it seems," replied Ned, coolly. "What do you intend to do with me? Choke me to death?"

"I may before I get through—that depends."

"On what?"

"On your own actions. What do you say about following me?"

"I don't say anything about it. I suppose I've got to do it if you say it's got to be done."

"Come on, then. Walk fast. I'm getting wet and want to get in out of the rain."

It was no use talking. The man with the revolver now slipped behind him.

"I'm right here, Young Klondike," he said. "I've got you covered. Take my advice and don't you try any funny business, for it means death to you if you do."

Decidedly Ned was not in the mood to try any funny business or to do anything but walk right along between his captors, for the revolver pressed against the back of his head.

Meanwhile, back in the hut all were sound asleep and entirely unsuspecting of danger.

Young Klondike had made a great mistake. He had deserted his post and that was where the trouble began; it was trouble which was likely to terminate seriously in the end.

There were other men sneaking up around the hut just then.

The notorious Joe Patton was one of them and Jack West was another.

A signal from the men up by the prospect holes told them that Young Klondike had been captured, and was being taken to the cave up the Gulch.

"That's all right, Jack," whispered the leader of the gold diggers. "We've made sure of the head horn of the pack, and now all that remains is to capture the rest, get the gold, capture the girl and light out."

"What are you going to do with the gold after you get it?" asked Jack. "Of course you can't go to Dawson with it."

"I don't know about that—I may."

"What about Young Klondike? If he comes down to Dawson things will be made pretty hot for us, I'm thinking."

"He'll never come to Dawson, sonny. Don't you fret yourself. Oh, no!"

"Do you mean to do him?" asked Jack.

"Well, perhaps."

"Don't think of it."

"And why not?"

"Why not? Because we'll be caught sure and swing from the nearest tree. I say let's light out for the mountains with the gal and the gold, and wait till the thing blows over."

"Humph!" growled Patton. "We'll get the gold first and then we'll see."

"That's what I say! Shall I whistle the boys down?"

"Yes, but I'm not going to make an attack."

"Hello! I thought that was settled!"

"Not at all."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Don't you fret yourself; there's more ways of killing a cat than choking her to death with cheese. I've got a little persuader here which will fix those fellows inside. I've brought men enough to handle them in case there's a muss, but all the same I don't

want to have any muss if it can be avoided, and I think it can."

As Joe Patton said this he drew out of his pocket a small bottle and shook it.

The bottle contained a whitish liquid.

"Oh, you old crook!" cried West, admiringly. "You're a sly one. You'd rather chloroform than fight, every time."

"That's what's the matter. Is the door open, Jack? Yes, by gracious, there they are all sound asleep. Well, and they'll sleep sounder still before I get through with them—that's right."

Just then a number of men attracted by Jack West's low whistle came stealing up through the rain.

"Surround the house, boys," whispered Patton. "Keep your eyes skinned and your ears wide open; if you hear the least sound that means trouble, just jump in and help me. Jack West, you can keep watch at the door."

He stole into the room, and drawing a dark lantern from his pocket, cautiously removed the slide and flashed the light around.

There were two doors to the hut.

One led into the room where the workmen slept and the other into Young Klondike's private apartments.

Joe Patton had entered by the former. Some of the workmen lay in bunks, others were stretched out on the floor rolled up in blankets; all were sound asleep.

With a fiendish smile Patton uncorked his bottle and saturated a handkerchief with the chloroform, first taking the precaution to cover his own mouth and nostrils with another handkerchief—something decidedly necessary considering that it was evidently his intention to go into the chloroforming business on an extensive scale.

The man understood his work. Joe Patton was an old hand at the bellows, so to speak. Back in the States he had been what is known as a second story thief, one who climbs up to second story windows and enters bed-chambers, stealing whatever he can lay his hands on, chloroforming the sleeper in the room if there is one. This man had done time in several States prisons. To say that he was as bad as they make 'em, is to only tell half the truth.

First he tackled one of the Frenchmen and had him unconscious in no time; the others followed one by one. Joe Patton made a clean job of it here and then passed on to the other side of the hut, entering with the greatest caution, for he realized that he had shrewder ones to deal with here.

His wicked little eyes flashed viciously from above the handkerchief as he stood and surveyed the sleepers.

Particularly was his attention attracted to the Unknown, who lay snoring in his bunk with his clothes on, the everlasting tall hat resting on a chair nearby.

"He's the worst, and I'll take him last," thought Patton. "The two girls will be easy game."

He must have known that they were in the loft overhead, for he crept up the ladder without hesitation.

He was gone but a few moments, and when he came down he put his head out the door and whispered to Jack West:

"I've fixed the gals, and I'll have the job done in a minute. Lay low now."

Next the sponge went under Dick Luckey's nose.

Dick yielded gracefully; the trouble came when Joe Patton tried his hand on the Unknown.

The instant the handkerchief touched the detective's face he sprang out of the bunk so suddenly, and with such energy that he knocked Joe Patton over.

The bottle was dashed from the villain's hand, the chloroform spilled, and all in an instant Patton and the detective were struggling on the floor.

"You scoundrel! I've got you at last!" roared the Unknown. "Wait till I clasp the bracelets on you. Dick! Ned! Help here!"

The poor Unknown was doing all he could, but the odds were terribly against him.

At the first noise Jack West and his companions came rushing into the hut, and in a moment the Unknown was overpowered and chloroformed like the rest.

Patton picked himself up pretty badly bruised.

"By gracious, that one showed fight," he growled.

"He gave me a terrible old rasping, he did."

"You might have known it," replied Jack West.

"He's the fellow what always passed as a detective down to Dawson; don't you remember him, Joe?"

"Sure I do. I know him well enough. I've a good mind to put a knife into his heart while there's time."

"Don't think of it. Murder never pays. We want the gal and we've got her. We want the gold and we've got that to get, so let's go about it right now."

"I'm ready. Where is the blame stuff I wonder?"

"'Twould have paid us better to have kept one of these fellows awake so's to make him tell."

"Gosh, don't you fret. I can find it. Of course, it's in the hut, and the place ain't so big but what we can search it in two shakes."

"What about the diggings?" demanded one of the men. "This place is confoundedly rich and we want to have a hack at it."

"That will come later," replied Patton. "You know our title, boys; we are the Gold Diggers of French Gulch, we are. We don't waste much time prospecting when we can get out of it. We dig after other people have made the strikes. Ha, ha, ha! That's our style, and it's the kind of digging that pays best of all. Here, you fellows, carry the McIntyre girl up to the cave. Shake up, lively, and get ready for a start. You'd better bring down all the bags, for if my information is correct there's gold enough here to load us all down in pretty good shape."

Jennie McIntyre was then carried out of the hut between two men, while Joe Patton commenced a systematic search for the gold.

First he took the loft and went through it so thoroughly and so rapidly that any one could see he was used to this sort of work.

No gold was found there, of course, but when Patton got down-stairs and began on the living room he soon discovered the trap-door in the floor.

"Here's the place, Jack!" he cried. "I've got it, I'll bet a hat!"

He seized the ring and pulled the trap-door up, shouting:

"Here it is! Here it is! We've tumbled right upon it! By gracious, what a slew of it there is to be sure!"

Next question was to get it out, and this was something which would take time, and time meant that the chloroformed ones would come back to their senses before the job was done.

To avoid any trouble from this source, Joe Patton made free with the ropes in the hut, and soon had all the workmen tied together.

Dick, Edith and the Unknown, were then tied up also, and carried into the other room, the door of which was then securely locked.

By this time the men were back with the bags, and the work of removing the gold began in earnest.

There was a lot of it, but there were many hands to assist in taking it out.

About half an hour later, a silent procession moved away from the hut.

Each was loaded down with a heavy bag of golden nuggets.

These were the notorious "Gold Diggers of French Gulch." They had captured Young Klondike's treasure.

In silence they filed up the gulch, and disappeared from view.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW YOUNG KLONDIKE STARTED ON THE TRAIL OF THE ROBBERS AND HOW THE UNKNOWN FOUND THE GOLD.

"THUNDER and guns!" cried Joe Patton, stopping short after the robber band had gone about a mile up the gulch. "Hang me, if I haven't forgotten Young Klondike, after all!"

Strange as this may seem it was so; and yet it was not so strange, for Joe Patton cared nothing for Young Klondike. He had succeeded in obtaining what he came down French Gulch after, and a moment's thought now told him that he had better be satisfied.

"Let the procession move!" he cried. "To blazes with Young Klondike!"

They started on through rain which was still falling, although not so heavily. In the lead was Joe Patton, and poor Jennie McIntyre walked beside him, closely guarded.

So far the evil schemes of the leader of the Gold Diggers' gang had succeeded, and it looked very

much as if they might go successfully through to the end.

Meanwhile Young Klondike, forgotten, was still lying a prisoner in the cave.

Ned was terribly chagrined. He felt that the whole trouble had been the result of his own carelessness and this made him feel all the worse.

But Ned was not the fellow to give up in despair as another might have done.

For the best part of an hour he had been here now, and during that time he had seen enough to realize pretty well what was going on down at the hut.

First it was the men who brought up poor Jennie McIntyre.

Then it was the carrying out of the cave of the pile of bags which Ned's sharp eyes discovered as soon as he came into it.

Everybody was captured. The gold had been discovered in its hiding-place, Young Klondike thought, and we know that he hit it off just right.

Ned knew it also when a little later he saw the gold diggers moving up the gulch with the bags over their backs.

It drove him almost wild to think of it. He twisted and turned trying in every way to set himself free, but it seemed no use.

"What in thunder have they done? Killed everybody and forgotten to kill me?" he thought. "By gracious, it looks very much like it unless—hush—somebody coming! I guess it's my turn now."

He could hear stealthy footsteps creeping along the rocks in the direction of the cave, and in a moment an Indian appeared at the opening.

"Big Eagle!" gasped Ned, recognizing the man, and doubtful whether his coming meant good luck or bad.

"Yes, boss. Me Big Eagle! Heap trouble! Huh?"

"That's what it is! Help me, Big Eagle. I helped you—help me, now."

"Ugh! Ugh! Dat's what me came for," grunted the savage. "Big Eagle watch! Big Eagle see um go! Big Eagle help Klondike boss get back him gold. Big Eagle get trail—tell Klondike boss. Good-by! Come quick! Big Eagle never fail."

All this talk was a good deal for an Indian to make, and it was made so rapidly that Ned was not able to get in a word.

While he was talking Big Eagle was working, too; he whipped out his knife and cut Young Klondike free, and lifted him to his feet with a strong hand and was out of the cave and off down the rocks like a shot.

Ned called to him to stop but he only turned, waved his hand, and was gone. The last Ned saw of him he was running up French Gulch, moving so rapidly as to make it seem absolutely certain that he must overtake them very soon.

Ned only lost a moment thus watching and then ran down the rocks to the hut as fast as his legs could carry him.

A strange sight met his gaze as he drew near. Both the doors stood open and the lights were burning inside, and there before the hut was the chunky figure of the Unknown rolling over and over on the ground.

"Ned! Help me! By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'm trussed up like a Christmas goose!" he called out. "Ye gods and little fishes, where have you been? There's been old Hob to pay here!"

It took Ned just about three seconds to release the Unknown from his disagreeable position.

"What's the matter?" he gasped. "Edith—Dick! Are they dead? What are they all lying there for?"

Ned was so excited that he could scarcely speak, for he could see Edith and Dick with all the workmen lying about on the floor inside the hut.

"Dead, no! Chloroformed!" yelled the Unknown in a fearful rage. "We were all done up, everyone of us, and the last ounce of the gold was stolen. Oh, Ned, you're a fine watchman, you are. By the Jumping Jeremiah, somebody ought to be cowhided for this, and I believe you are the man."

Now one might suppose that Young Klondike would take offense at this strong talk, but he didn't a bit.

He felt that he more than half deserved it for deserting his post even for a moment, and besides that he was prepared to stand a good deal from the Unknown.

They ran into the hut and in no time had Dick and Edith free, the miners following in their turn as a matter of course.

It was rather a dismal crowd which gathered around the open trap door in the other side of the hut, comparing notes over the startling occurrences of the night.

"I take all the blame to myself," said Ned. "I did desert my post. I was caught napping. I wish somebody would kick me. I'm all ready for any one who wants the job."

"Rats, rubbish!" cried the detective. "That means me, but my bark is worse than my bite, and I didn't mean what I said just now. We are all in it, and to a certain extent all equally to blame. Question is what's to be done now?"

"Follow up Big Eagle," said Edith, emphatically. "I can never rest quiet till I know that poor Jennie is out of the hands of that fiend."

"Motion seconded!" cried Dick. "I owe him one for what he did to me. I say go, and go now."

"And the New Bonanza?" questioned Ned. "I say go too, and I say it most emphatically, but I want to understand how everything is to be arranged."

"We ought to be good for that gang," said the detective. "We've done up worse ones before now."

"But the mine?" added Dick. "That's what Ned asked. What about the New Bonanza? I say leave the men to run it in our absence and let the work go right on. That's your idea, Ned?"

"My idea exactly," replied Young Klondike. "Who objects?"

Nobody objected, and within twenty minutes from the time this conversation was held the avenging party, fully equipped with rifles and provisions, started away from the New Bonanza and marched up the gulch.

"It seems like a wild goose chase," said Edith, after they had been on the move for some little time. "Here we are traveling along without the faintest idea where we are going or which way the gold diggers went."

"We can't be wrong as yet," declared Ned. "They went up the gulch and we are going up the gulch; we are bound to run into their trail sooner or later, and then all we've got to do is to follow it till we come up with them. I'm sure we shall succeed."

"Sanguine as usual, dear boy," laughed the Unknown. "You are the fellow who always keeps our spirits up when things look the darkest. There's one thing, though, those fellows ain't going to lug that gold very far, and don't you forget it. I think we can mark that down with a red mark."

"It's marked down," replied Ned, "but what's that there in the mud—a footprint? By Jove, so it is."

Morning was just beginning to dawn, and the rain had practically ceased. Our travelers had now come out into a place where it was rather more open. An extended mud flat reached from the base of the rocks to the edge of the swollen creek, and as Young Klondike looked further over this stretch he knew that he had struck the trail.

"That's what it is," said the Unknown. "There's one footprint, and there's another, and another—why there's a whole line of them; this is the way they went all right, dear boy."

"And here's poor Jennie's footprint," said Edith, looking down. "You can see it's lighter than the rest as well as smaller."

"That's because they didn't load her down with the gold," said the detective. "The rest had all they could carry, and that's what makes the footprints so deep."

For about half a mile they continued to follow the mud flat, and then came a surprise. The footprints suddenly disappeared, and yet the mud flat extended a good deal further on.

"Hold on?" cried the Unknown, realizing the situation. "This beats the band. Where in thunder did they go to?"

It was a question anyone might be excused for asking.

On one side the rocks rose high above them, on the other was the creek rushing down French Gulch to join El Dorado further along.

"There's only two ways out of this," said Dick. "Either they took to the creek or they went up the rocks. Which was it?"

"Blest if I can tell you," replied Ned, "but look, there's more footprints further on, don't you see them close against the rocks?"

It certainly looked like footprints, but they were at some distance away.

Young Klondike hurried across the intervening mud and examined them.

"Indians!" he cried.

"Where! Where!" exclaimed the Unknown unslinging his rifle and standing ready for business.

"Pshaw! No one said anything about Indians coming, only that there were Indian footprints—ain't that it, Ned?"

"That's what's the matter," called Ned. "It's Big Eagle and he's left us his card."

Ned leaned over against the rocks, close to which the footprints ran, and pulled an eagle's feather out of a crevice.

There was a bit of birch bark attached to the feather.

All could see it, but they did not understand what it meant until Ned came back to where they were. He was examining the birch bark attentively as he walked along.

"What have you struck?" asked Dick.

"Seems to be a note from Big Eagle," replied Ned.

"At least that's what I make of it. Look at it, Ned, and see what you think."

The Unknown took the birch bark upon which lines had been scrawled with some sharp point.

"Looks like a lot of crows' tracks," he said. "I can't make anything out of this, and I don't believe there is anything in it."

"You don't!" cried Dick. "Well, you're a great detective, I must say! Look here! It's a regular picture. You can see it if you look sharp. It's a picture of this place."

It evidently was. As they came to study it more attentively, they could see that it represented the rocks and the creek, and the mud flat, and there were the footprints, too, all done in crude outline, which no one who had not seen something of this curious style of writing before, could very well understand.

Dick had and so had Ned. In their dealings with the Indians, they had studied their ways not a little, and it was this which made Ned seize upon the picture writing, which otherwise he might have overlooked.

"It's a note from Big Eagle telling us which way he went," he declared. "Look, here's an eagle in the corner—he's flying toward the rocks. Don't you see the spread of his wings? That's what it means as sure as you live."

"I'll be hanged if I don't think you are right," said the detective, "although I never should have guessed it. Yes, that looks like an eagle and he is certainly flying toward the rocks."

"Which means that we must fly over the rocks," said Dick, "and I think we'll have to if we are going over them at all. I don't believe we'll ever get up any other way."

"They ain't so steep up where Big Eagle left the note," said Ned, "but still I don't see how the Gold Diggers could have gone there; if they went over the rocks, and I suppose they must have or Big Eagle

wouldn't have gone, they must have tackled them right here."

"It can be done," said Edith, studying the appearance of the precipice.

"Of course we can do it," replied Ned. "I'd guarantee to climb up there any day in the week."

"We'd better tackle it," said the detective. "If it is to be done, the sooner it's done the better—here goes!"

The Unknown made a run up the steep incline; he got along famously for a moment, and then all at once missed his footing, and came tumbling back again, his tall hat flew off, and the full impress of his noble form was left in the mud.

Nobody could help laughing at the comical picture, serious as the situation was, and the Unknown had to laugh at himself, for he was not hurt a bit.

"You made a miss of it that time," said Edith, "but it won't hinder me from trying it. I can do better than that myself."

"Try it a little further along," suggested Dick; "it's easier going there."

They did so, and found safer footing. Dangerous work it was, of course, but they managed to climb up to the top of the precipice, and here another discovery was made.

Big Eagle had been there before them, and left another note.

It was pinned to a crevice in the rock with an eagle's feather, as the former one had been and was written the same way.

The picture showed something of the wonderful panorama, which now opened out before them.

There was the broad mountain lake which lay almost at their feet, and the hills beyond it. There were the surrounding rocks and even the larger trees shown all with remarkable accuracy.

There were several eagles on the picture flying towards the lake and out upon it. To any one understanding Indian picture writing the whole thing was plain enough.

But as yet Young Klondike and Dick were not fully up to it and did not understand at first.

"Why does he put those four eagles on the picture?" asked Edith.

"Because he was joined by some of his friends I reckon," said the Unknown.

Dick thought so too, but Ned wouldn't have it that way at all.

"Nonsense!" he declared, "I'll be willing to bet it ain't anything of the sort. It's his own course—just that and nothing more."

"Then he didn't go across the lake," said Dick.

"Why certainly he went across the lake—can't you see that the eagles are flying that way?"

"Yes, but they don't go clear across the lake—see, the lake is represented by a circle, and the last eagle stops in the middle of it."

"Has Big Eagle drowned himself then?" queried the Unknown. "What nonsense! He must have

gone across the lake or—by the Jumping Jeremiah, I have it! The island!"

"Well, I declare, I never thought of the island!" exclaimed Edith. "That's what it means, of course."

All were satisfied that the Unknown had hit upon the true solution of the mystery, for looking off upon the lake they could see the island distinctly—they had seen it in the first place, indeed, but did not understand that it might have any significance to them.

It was a great rock rising some forty feet up from the water; stunted bushes and a few trees grew on top, and other bushes clung to the sides.

"Bother take you!" cried the Unknown, shaking his fist at the island, "you are all well enough, and this birch bark map business is all well enough, but how are we going to get over to you—that's what I want to know!"

"We'll get down to the shore of the lake first before we get excited about it," said Edith. "Perhaps Big Eagle has provided a way."

But this was easier said than done.

The way down the rocks was even steeper than the way up, yet it soon became perfectly evident that the trail ran in that direction.

For as they advanced they struck a place where the mud had accumulated on top of the rocks during the recent rain.

Their way lay right across this muddy stretch, and there upon it were the same old footprints again.

It was easy to distinguish Jennie McIntyre's among them, and there crossing over all were the moccasined footprints of Big Eagle. The Indian was hot on the trail.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we are right in it!" cried the Unknown. "Our noble red man has not deceived us. I'll lead on to victory, but it seems to me that we ought to be able to see something of the enemy by this time."

"I think myself it would be well to take a look before we make a start," said Ned, and he proceeded to get out his glass.

Long and earnestly he looked at the island.

"I can't make out that there's any one on top there," he said at last, removing his eyes from the glass.

"And yet do you know it seems to me that I can see someone," said Edith.

"Same here," declared the Unknown. "I was watching all the time you were looking. I felt sure I could see something moving, but I wouldn't want to say whether it was man or beast."

"Then I must be blind," said Ned.

"Or didn't look in the right place," added Dick, "which amounts to the same thing."

"Give me the glass," said Edith, and she had no sooner put it to her eyes than she cried out that she could see Jennie McIntyre moving about on top of the rock.

"I see certainly something moving," said Ned. "It's gone now."

"Yes, she's gone."

"Watch and see if she don't appear again. It was right by that tallest tree."

"I don't think anything about it—I know I saw her near the tree," declared Edith. "It was Jennie. I'm absolutely certain about it, but I don't see her now."

This was becoming interesting. Edith watched for some time, but saw nothing more of the figure which had attracted her attention.

Then, like most other people she began to doubt the plain evidence of her own senses, and to wonder whether she had actually seen the girl or not.

The Unknown summed up the evidence by declaring that there was probably somebody on the island.

"It may be that they are all there, or it may be that the girl has managed to escape and is there alone," he said; "at all events I think it's time we were on the move."

Dick looked at the steep descent dubiously.

"There's going to be trouble getting down there," he declared. "I think we'd better tie ourselves together, it's always safer so."

Ned opposed this, and Edith just wouldn't have it. "We've got to take our chances," she declared, "and for my part, I think I can do better alone."

It was decided that the Unknown should lead the way and he started to do so; everything was going on swimmingly until he had almost reached the lake shore, when suddenly he lost his footing again and went down the rest of the way with a rush.

Edith gave a scream, as well she might, for indeed all thought he would be killed.

He struck the ground hard and they saw his feet go up and the tall hat went flying in the air, but the Unknown himself disappeared for the instant.

He was picking himself up out of a mass of juniper boughs when they came hurrying down.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, the fellow who set this man trap ought to be hid!" he exclaimed. "Look at it! Ye gods and little fishes, look at it! That infernal hole was covered over with these loose boughs, but it means something just the same."

The hole in question had been scooped out in the mud at the foot of the rocks, and covered over with the juniper boughs.

As luck would have it the Unknown had fallen on the boughs and down he went right into it, and down in it he was now with both feet tossing the boughs out.

"There's something buried here, Young Klondike," he declared. "There! Just as I thought! Look at it! It's the gold!"

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE HAPPENING ON THE ISLAND.

HAD the Unknown actually discovered the buried gold?

Most decidedly he had.

Before the last of the boughs came out Ned could see the bags snugly reposing in the hole.

"Those are the bags the gold diggers carried!" he exclaimed. "I'll vouch for it."

"I'll have it out and prove it," declared the Unknown. "Look out, boys! Take it from me. By gracious, it's a heavy load to carry and no mistake."

It was just about all the Unknown wanted to do with his short arm, to lift the bag out of the hole.

Ned took it and opened it, the fastening being only a string.

As he fully anticipated, it contained part of the missing nuggets.

"It's Joe Patton's cache," declared Dick. "He couldn't get it across the lake, and so he buried it here."

"Out with the rest, Zed," said Young Klondike. "Look alive now, and if you want any help I'll come down."

"Hold on," replied the detective, coming up out of the hole. "I hate awfully to contradict you, dear boy, but I just ain't going to do anything of the sort."

"And why not?"

"Why, what's the use? The gold is safer here than anywhere. I say let it be where it is, and then no suspicion is excited in case the gold diggers come back."

"I think he's right," said Edith. "What could we do with it anyway, even supposing that we got it out?"

Ned had to admit the force of the argument. He could see no good purpose to be served by taking the gold out of the hole.

"We'd better cover it up again I suppose," he said; "the thing for us to do is to get over to the island, but I'll be hanged if I see how we are going to accomplish that."

It certainly was a puzzler.

The lake was several miles in length, and the island lay at least a mile distant from where they were. There was neither boat nor Indian canoe to be seen, and worse still only a few stunted trees grew near the shore, so to build a raft—something that Young Klondike at first thought of—was quite impossible.

"We can't get over from here that's certain," declared the detective, "but see, the island is nearer to the shore, if you can get down opposite to it, and there's quite a little grove of trees there."

"Just what I was thinking," said Dick. "Suppose we move down that way."

"I see no objection," said Ned. "We are helpless here and it might be better there—we can only try."

So they started along the shore, and after putting in a good half mile in a swamp where the tundra grass was almost as high as their heads, and the balance of the way scrambling over dead tree trunks and rocks, they at length came out opposite the island, pausing all breathless in a little grove of stunted trees.

The island now stood out plainly before them, perhaps two hundred feet away from the shore.

"Well, there you are, boys," said the detective. "You see it; now then what's to be done? There's no boat here."

"But we might build a raft," said Dick.

"Yes, if we had an ax to cut down some of these trees, which we haven't."

"There are the dead trees further back. They are somewhat burned by the fire which must have swept over this place not so very long ago, but I think they would answer the purpose just the same."

"It's going to be a long job to build a raft," said the detective. "Of course we may have to do it, but on the other hand if we put off from the shore here on a raft we shall be a bang-up mark for any one who happens to be on the island watching us, and if it happens that Joe Patton's gang of gold diggers are there, I think it's rather doubtful if any of us ever live to reach the island at all."

"You've got some suggestion to make," said Young Klondike eying the detective. "Out with it, Zed."

"Oh, no! I've got no suggestion to make. I only wish I was a good swimmer—that's all."

"That means you would like to have me swim over to the island and have a look around?"

"It means that I would do it, if I could swim as well as you can—that's all."

"I'll go," said Ned, promptly. "If that is what you want you shall have it, Zed."

Dick opposed and so did Edith; they thought the risk entirely too great.

But Ned had made up his mind to try it, and there was no such thing as stopping him.

"Just make yourselves at home here till I come back," he said. "I shan't be long gone, and when you see me again you'll know more about the island than you do now."

Young Klondike then retired among the bushes, stripped himself and plunged into the icy water of the lake.

"There he goes!" cried the Unknown, as he swam around into view. "He'll get there all right, and he'll get back again all right—don't you fret."

They continued to watch him as he swam on. Now his head was visible, now it was under the water; they watched the island, too, but nobody came in sight on top of the rock.

Reaching the island at last, Ned crawled up under the rock and crouched down to rest and get his breath.

Had he made a fool of himself after all? He half thought so. The great rock towered above his head, presenting sides so steep that to climb it seemed simply impossible; besides if he were to go up, there was the terrible risk of meeting some of the gold diggers gang on top.

It seemed altogether a foolhardy undertaking to Young Klondike, but he was here and he determined not to leave without at least making an effort to learn

something of the situation, so he started along the shore with the intention of going entirely around the island before giving it up.

It was hard walking in one's bare feet on the shore here, for the ground was covered with loose fragments of rock, which had broken off and fallen down from above. Ned examined the rock closely. It was a great mass of disintegrated sandstone, broken and seamed in every direction. As he picked his way along, keeping as close in under it as possible, several pieces fell at his feet. At first he thought that someone was throwing stones at him, but he soon saw that it was only the natural disintegration of the rock.

"Upon my word it wouldn't take much to throw the whole business down and tumble the rock into the lake," thought Ned. "I wonder if we can be mistaken in thinking there is anybody up there? I'm almost inclined to think we are."

The thought had scarcely crossed his mind when a loud cracking noise was heard right in front of him, and with no other warning a great mass of rock tumbled outward strewing the shore with fragments, while many great pieces went splashing into the lake.

"Holy gee! The whole island is going to blazes!" yelled a voice, and Ned could hear hurried footsteps, inside the rock it sounded to him.

"It's a cave—the gang is there!" he thought, and waiting for nothing further he plunged into the lake, just in time to avoid being seen by Joe Patton, Jack West and several others of the gold diggers' gang who now came running out through the opening with their rifles in their hands.

It was a close call. A second more and it would probably have been all up with Young Klondike.

But a miss is as good as a mile. Ned was under the water swimming for all he was worth. When he ventured to come up again there was nobody in sight on the shore.

The danger had passed. Ned swam over to the mainland and crawled in among the bushes, congratulating himself on his narrow escape.

CHAPTER XI.

PRISONERS IN THE ROCK.

"HELLO, Young Klondike! Come and show yourself and make your report."

The Unknown came breaking through the bushes as Ned was in the act of pulling on his clothes.

"Did you see the rock split apart?" asked Ned.

"I did," said Dick, who now came up also. "I saw the gold diggers, too."

"You did, eh? Did you see me jump into the water?"

"You bet! You were not a moment too soon."

"Not half a moment! Do you think they saw me?"

"Didn't look so. We were watching them carefully through the glass, too."

"Come, come!" said the Unknown. "It ain't what we saw, but what you saw, Young Klondike. That's what we want to know."

"Unfortunately you won't get any further information from me," replied Ned. "All I discovered was just what you saw through the glass."

"Then your swim was for nothing?"

"Practically so. We know now that the gold diggers are on the island, but that's all."

"It's enough to start with. Was that a cave?"

"Must have been. I got no chance to look."

"What made the rock fall?"

"I'll never tell you. It's nothing but coarse sandstone. It seems to be breaking all the time. A lot of small pieces fell down before the big one dropped. I heard Joe Patton say that the whole island was breaking up—that was just as I gave the jump. I suppose I might have heard a lot more if it had only been safe to wait."

"Which it wasn't most decidedly. But let's get back to Edith. She worried a lot about you, and I tell you what it is, Young Klondike, I was glad myself to see you come ashore."

When they got back to Edith they found her examining a bit of birch bark with close attention.

"Another letter from Big Eagle!" she exclaimed. "I found it stuck in a hole in this tree. Strange we didn't see it before."

"Can you make anything out of it?" asked Dick.

"Not a thing, but maybe Ned can."

Ned tried it after he told his story to Edith.

The picture was a puzzler.

It represented three men and one woman tied together with a rope.

Behind them was an Indian holding the end of the rope, and evidently pulling on it. Over in one corner was the island; the water of the lake was represented by wavy lines. Behind the island the moon was seen rising.

It was the most puzzling of all Big Eagle's letters, and Ned scratched his head over it in vain.

"What in the world can it mean?" demanded the Unknown, looking over his shoulder.

"I'll be blest if I know," replied Ned. "Yet it has a meaning, of course. It must, let me think—let me think—oh, I have it! By gracious, it's as plain as print. Look here, Edith."

"I'm looking," said Edith, "but I can't make anything out of it."

"Why, it's this way; here's an Indian; that's Big Eagle, and these four figures are intended for us."

"Oh, I saw through that at the start."

"Very good; now, what is the Indian trying to do? Holding us back, ain't he?"

"Of course, he is!" cried Dick. "That's it. He wants to hold us back till the moon rises—there you are."

"Just as sure as you live."

"It certainly looks that way," said the detective, "and I say let's accept it that way and hold back."

"There's a full moon to-night about half-past eleven."

"You're right."

"We'll wait. Depend upon it, we shall hear from Big Eagle then."

It was a long, dreary job to wait there on the shore for so many hours, but this was the occupation Young Klondike's party found themselves engaged in from that time on until the sun went down.

They kept in among the bushes out of sight, but there was never a moment that someone was not watching the island.

The watch was not all in vain either, although the sum of their discoveries did not amount to much.

Several times they saw Joe Patton come out on top of the rock with a glass, and look long and earnestly up the lake, but he never seemed to see what he wanted. Each time they could see him shut the glass angrily and then disappear.

Toward sunset—that was between ten and eleven o'clock—he remained watching for as much as half an hour, and there were two others with him. Then darkness settled down over the island and they were seen no more.

"They are expecting someone," said the Unknown.

"Know what I think, boys?"

"Can't imagine," replied Dick.

"On the other hand I can imagine anything," said Ned, "but I would rather hear Zed speak out for himself."

"They are in the same fix we are in; they are expecting someone."

"Of course. That goes without saying."

"Someone in boats I mean. The idea is this. It's only part of the gang which attacked us. They've got friends further up the lake, and they've sent for them to come down and bring boats so as to carry off the gold."

It seemed very reasonable. The detective argued that the gold diggers probably had but one boat, which had been used to take their party over to the island, and that the gold had been buried simply because they were unable to carry it any further.

We may as well mention right here that the Unknown had hit the truth.

It had now grown dark and the whole party were anxiously waiting for the appearance of Big Eagle. At half past eleven the moon rose, but it was soon lost in a cloud bank a little later, and the whole sky clouded over and it began to look as though another storm was close at hand.

"Confound that Indian, why don't he come?" exclaimed the Unknown. "I'm getting tired of this long wait. By the Jumping Jeremiah, I want to be up and doing. How much longer have we got to hold back for Big Eagle I'd like to know."

They were standing on the shore at the time, for it was now too dark to run any risk of being seen from the island.

"There! What's that?" exclaimed Edith, pointing off toward the big rock. "Ain't that a boat coming now?"

"Hang me if it ain't," cried the detective. "Look, Ned!"

"I see!" replied Ned. "He's coming! I felt sure he would!"

A small boat had just come into view around the point of the island.

There was a solitary figure in it; whether he was an Indian or white man it was hard to say, but certain it was, whoever the man might be he was paddling the boat toward shore Indian fashion, and seemed to be heading directly for the place where Young Klondike's party were.

Soon they were able to make out Big Eagle, and they now knew that they had not put confidence in the Indian in vain.

"We shall soon know all about it," said the detective. "Give me a hack at that boat and I'm over there whether Big Eagle says so or not."

A low whistle was soon heard, and the Indian catching sight of them waved his hand.

Ned responded to the signal, and Big Eagle brought the boat skillfully in under the bushes and leaped ashore.

"Good, boss!" he said. "You come. Good! You trust Big Eagle. Good! You get him letters—huh?"

"We got three," Ned replied. "That's why we are here. What's the news, Big Eagle? We have been waiting for you for hours now."

"Me tell Young Klondike boss, heap news. White squaw over dere!"

"We know it."

"Bad men dere, too; gold diggers! White Chief Patton, boss—you know."

"We know," replied Ned. "What's to be done, Big Eagle?"

"What's to be done? Look, Klondike boss! Big Eagle hide over dere. Big Eagle watch. Him see you come! Too soon. No, wait till dark night. Now de time. All come, and we help little white squaw, and den Big Eagle show you where Patton chief hide gold."

"Good for you, Big Eagle, but we know that already," replied Ned, "but we go with you, just the same. If we can rescue the white squaw we'll never forget you. Big Eagle will not be sorry he helped me."

The Indian grunted. He wanted no reward, he said. What he had done and was about to do he did out of gratitude for what Young Klondike had done to him.

"We'll get right over there," said the Unknown. "There has been time enough wasted in talk. We'll go now."

Big Eagle was ready. As they entered the boat he explained that it belonged to Joe Patton, that he had swam over to the island and had been hiding there watching his chance to get possession of the boat.

Then he took up the paddle and began to work the boat over to the island, making almost as good headway as if he had been using a pair of oars.

"Ain't you afraid they'll see us?" asked Dick.

"Wouldn't it be better to lie down in the boat?"

"Young Klondike boss' friend, no fret," replied Big Eagle. "How men can see when eyes shut, huh?"

"They are all asleep?" asked Ned.

"Yes, boss. You know what dey did at New Bonanza? Dey put Young Klondike boss and him friends all asleep. Big Eagle put dem all asleep—ugh!"

"Hello, Big Eagle! Have you taken to chloroforming, too?" cried the Unknown. "Well, if you ain't the slickest Indian ever I did see!"

"Ugh! What big hat chief talk about?" grunted the Indian. "Me no know. Me know every plant and every tree dat grows. Me habe stuff to put white men to sleep too. Me wait. Me put it in coffee, den dey drink it—ugh!"

Big Eagle took a small bottle out of his pocket and shook it. It contained a brownish liquid, which certainly was not chloroform. Big Eagle explained that it was distilled from a certain plant which grew in the tundra swamps, and that any one drinking it would sleep sound for hours.

It made the Unknown decidedly nervous to hear him tell it in his emphatic way.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I shouldn't care to live in the same house with that fellow," he whispered to Ned. "If he took a notion to do us up in the night what show would we have—just none at all."

Soon after this they reached the island, going ashore on the other side where Ned did not succeed in getting on his previous trip.

As soon as they had landed and the boat was secured, Ned began to question Big Eagle about the way of getting up on the rock.

"Me show you," replied the Indian. "Dere two ways now. When rock break den dere come another way. All hollow in here, Klondike boss. We no don't have to go up on the rock."

"If we 'no don't have to' then we do have to," thought Ned, but he told Big Eagle to lead the way and do just as he pleased.

The Indian, pressing his finger against his mouth as a sign for silence, led off around the shore to the place where the rock had broken down.

"Hush!" he whispered. "No talk now! Dey all in dere asleep. Follow me."

They peered through the opening in the rock but could see nothing, it was so dark.

"Get out your revolvers, boys," whispered the detective, "and I'll do the handcuffing. I've got cord enough in my pocket to tie up a regiment. You'll see me take my man."

"Hush! Hush!" breathed Big Eagle again; "no can go in if heap talk."

"Go on," said the Unknown, who was not to be silenced so. "Go right on—we'll do the rest."

Big Eagle grunted in a dissatisfied way and led on into the cave, if cave it could be called.

After a few steps they were able to see that the opening in the island took up almost its entire space, that the rock was a mere shell and a very rotten one at that, for the whole surface of the ground was strewn with fragments which had fallen down from the walls.

Ned could not see anything of the gold diggers as yet.

In a moment they came into the middle of the open space, and to the surprise of all there stood a rude log cabin which had been previously concealed by a pile of rocks.

"There! There!" whispered Big Eagle. "Now you see, white squaw in dere—everybody in dere; you take white squaw, Klondike boss?"

"Take her now and let the rest go," replied Ned.

"Not much!" said the detective. "I'm going to take my man or bust."

"We want Jennie first," said Edith. "Quick, Ned! Get her and take her out on the shore."

They crept up around the open door of the hut, and peered in.

There were only about a dozen men there, and these lay sprawled about the floor in every direction, just as they had dropped after drinking the drugged coffee.

The rest of the men had gone up the lake in two other boats which they kept here on the island, which for a long time had been their principal hold out. The idea was to bring down the remainder of the gold diggers' gang, for Joe Patton's intention was to quit French Gulch altogether.

It was about time, too. The crooked operations of these men had made them notorious. Honest miners—and there were plenty of them in French Gulch—hated the gold diggers with a deadly hatred. Their operations against the unfortunate Mr. McIntyre were well known, and even now a strong party had been organized against them and were hunting them among the hills.

Such was the situation although Young Klondike and his friends did not know it; their interest now was to rescue Jennie McIntyre who was not to be seen.

"Where's the white squaw?" whispered Ned, as they entered the hut.

Big Eagle pointed to the loft.

"Me get her," he said. "No touch these men. No wake."

"Who says so?" growled the Unknown. "I want Patton, and I mean to have him. I want that fellow West, too."

Now it happened that the Unknown knew Jack West and bore an old grudge against him. To have captured these two men the detective would have been willing to run any risk, and Ned knew it was no use to try to hold him back.

Big Eagle ran up the ladder, and the Unknown, whipping out a lot of strong cord, bent over Joe

Patton and began to tie his hands together at the wrists.

"Here, give me some of that cord and I'll help you do it," whispered Ned. "Dick, you stand by to help Big Eagle down with Jennie. I suppose she is drugged like the rest."

They had secured Patton and West when Big Eagle came down the ladder carrying Jennie in his arms.

"The poor child!" murmured Edith. "Here, give her to me, Big Eagle! It's a shame!"

"No, no! Me carry white squaw, no can," said the Indian, and he pushed his way on out of the hut.

"We'll take Patton with us, and then come back for West," said the Unknown. "Lend me a hand here, Young Klondike. We'll carry him out in just two shakes."

They picked up the leader of the gold diggers head and feet and ran him out of the hut.

Meanwhile Big Eagle laid Jennie down close to the opening in the rocks where Edith was bending over her.

"No be troubled, white squaw," he said; "she come back; she wake up all right; one hour—mebbe two; all right, dough. You see."

"We want West," said the detective, laying Patton down. "Come on, Big Eagle! Lend me a hand."

They returned to the hut then, and Dick remained with Ned and Edith, for in spite of what Big Eagle said they were not a little worried about poor Jennie.

"It will be all right," said Ned. "See, she is sleeping quietly enough. Of course, if she drank the coffee she had to come in for the drugging with the rest. Big Eagle can be relied on; there is nothing to worry about, I'm sure."

But Edith was worried; she rubbed the girl's hands and called her name many times, and tried in every way to arouse her.

She was still trying it, when all at once a report like thunder rang out upon the still night air.

"The rocks! There's going to be another cave-in!" gasped Ned, springing to his feet.

He was barely in time to see what happened. Dick and Edith bending over Jennie did not see at all.

Again the sound made itself heard, and before anyone could make a move the rocks came crashing down about their heads on all sides.

The rotten shell which formed the upper part of the island had collapsed from some unseen cause.

The shock was terrible. With a thunderous roar the rocks fell all about them, but yet by a wonderful coincidence not a hair of their heads was harmed.

When it was all over and the vast cloud of dust raised had in a measure subsided, Young Klondike found himself penned in on all sides.

A cave had been formed by the falling fragments. They were prisoners in the rock.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST OF THE GOLD DIGGERS' GANG.

"NED! Oh, Ned! What has happened?"

Poor Edith could scarcely find words, her alarm was so great.

Ned flung his arm about her and Dick caught her on the other side.

"We can only die together!" breathed Young Klondike. "Be brave, Edith! The worst may have happened or it may be still to come."

They stood there motionless listening to every sound.

There were crackings and groanings; now and again a big bit of rock would come crashing at their feet. Then a fragment would seem to collapse altogether and come down as a shower of dust.

All at once they heard a dismal cry beyond the walls of their prison.

"Young Klondike! Young Klondike! By the Jumping Jeremiah! Are you still alive?"

It was the Unknown!

Remember, he was on the other side of the fallen rocks, but Joe Patton, their enemy, still lay there sleeping calmly at Young Klondike's feet.

"Alive, yes! Alive and kicking!" shouted Ned. "We're all right in here; how is it with you?"

"Nothing the matter with me, dear boy, except that I can't get at you."

"And Big Eagle?"

"All right—all right!" they heard the buck's deep bass voice growl.

"Have the rocks fallen in there?"

"They've fallen all around us. There are a dozen ways open to the shore now."

"Heavens! I wish there was one open for us, then," groaned Ned. "We are penned in here, and upon my word, I don't see how we are ever going to get out."

It was indeed so. The situation was most alarming. Four great masses of rock had fallen together, much in the way that a child might pile up cards to build a house.

To move them was quite impossible; to get out from between them without moving them equally so, and yet with all the horrors of a lingering death staring them in the face, Young Klondike was perfectly cool.

"Zed! Oh, Zed!" he called.

"Hello!" replied the detective; "what can I do for you, dear boy?"

"Lend a hand on these rocks. We'll push and you and Big Eagle pull. We must force our way out of here."

"It's sure death, dear boy. If they should fall on you—what then?"

"We must take our chances. We can't stay here to die."

"Do it, Zed," said Edith, calmly. "It's a terrible risk, but it must be done."

It was easy enough to say it must be done, but Young Klondike had proposed a task to the detective that he could not perform.

They might as well have tried to move the side of a mountain as to move the rocks, and yet moved they must be or death would be the certain result.

"Zed!" called Young Klondike. "Oh, Zed!"

"What is it, dear boy?"

"We must have help here."

"We must, Ned."

"How is it to be done?"

"There is only one way, and that is for Big Eagle and I to go back to the New Bonanza and bring up our men."

"Go!"

"And leave you here alone?"

"Hardly alone. There's company enough."

"A lot of dead men now, but they may be lively enough before we get back."

"Will be, I suppose, but we can't help that."

"And you can't help it if they try to pull the rocks down on you."

"Remember we have their leader here. Will they want to kill him? Hardly, I think."

"Then we shall go!"

"Go—yes. Go now! Our lives depend upon it. Go!"

"I'm gone!" cried the Unknown. "Heaven grant that you may be here all right when we return."

It was a lonely sound to listen to those retreating footsteps, but it was lonelier still after they died away.

During the hours that followed Young Klondike suffered agonies of suspense, for poor Dick was deep in the dumps. Dick could not see how the rocks were ever to be moved no matter how many came to help. It was all that Ned and Edith could do to keep his spirits up as the day wore on. And as the evening drew near the Unknown had not returned.

Meanwhile, the drugged gold diggers slept on peacefully.

Twice Ned thought that Joe Patton was going to wake up, and once the fellow actually did turn over, but it was only to sleep on sounder than ever, and after all it was one of the men in the hut who woke up first.

Ned could hear him stirring about, hear him more distinctly when he began to shout to his friends and try to arouse them.

Then another and another woke up; then, at last, all seemed to be awake. Their surprise at the changed situation of things was great enough, but the greatest surprise of all seemed to be to know what had made them sleep.

"What in thunder can it all mean?" they heard Jack West say again and again. "Has there been an earthquake? Were we all knocked silly? Where's Joe?"

These were the questions.

Then it was shouts for Joe, and they could hear the fellows running all around the island talking and call-

ing; nobody even seemed to think of the big pile of fallen rock, and Young Klondike and the rest kept as still as mice, for they had no wish to have their hiding-place discovered now.

Suddenly there was a wild shout, and all the men seemed to run in one direction.

"Their friends have come at last," said Ned, and so it proved, for as they listened they could hear their talk on the other shore. The boats were there now, and after a little the gold diggers went away in them.

In spite of the increased danger of their presence on the island, it was lonely to hear them go.

Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed when a sharp firing was heard off in the lake, followed by wild shouts.

"What's that?" cried Ned.

"An attack!" echoed Dick. "It's the Unknown and our crowd."

The shouts and shots continued for a few moments, and then all was still again.

"What can have happened?" exclaimed Edith. "Are they never coming? Oh, Ned, what's that?"

It was a fearful sound, a slipping, sliding noise. One of the big rocks was slowly going down.

"Heavens! We are lost!" gasped Ned, and even as he said it the rocks fell all around them with a resounding crash.

Fell, yes, but fell outward instead of inward, as Young Klondike had feared.

"Free! Free!" shouted Ned, throwing up his hat. "Free and safe! Here comes the Unknown! Look! Look!"

The change of fortune had all come at once. It was like being suddenly snatched from death into life, for now all was clear out to the lake and the last vestige of danger had passed.

The lake was full of boats and canoes—there were as many as twenty, and in advance was the boat Big Eagle had taken with the Unknown, Big Eagle himself and three of the Frenchmen in it, coming up the lake.

"Hooray for Young Klondike!" bawled the Unknown, throwing up his hat. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, they are all safe!"

Safe, yes—safe from all danger now.

The rocks had fallen and left Young Klondike's party unharmed. The gold diggers were all prisoners to a man; captured in their canoes by the band of sturdy miners, who had been tracking them for a week, and who had started across the lake after them in canoes, just in time to pounce on the gang.

The Unknown arrived at the right time to be in the fight, and it was he who captured Jack West, but he was too late to help Young Klondike and his party. They needed no help now.

All's well that ends well they say, and Young Klondike came out of these terrible trials first best.

The men who had been left on the shore to come over to the island on the second trip never got there, for Young Klondike and the others soon joined them, and there was a glad reunion all around.

The gold was dug up and taken back to the New Bonanza, which mine is still being worked by Young Klondike, and very profitable it has proved.

The gold diggers were taken down to Dawson and run out of the country. It is said that they went back to Juneau and Joe Patton went with the rest. Death will be the penalty if they return.

Jennie McIntyre recovered from the effects of the drug while in the boat on her way to the shore of the lake.

Great was her surprise on learning what had happened.

For a while the girl remained with Edith, but later on she married a respectable miner, to whom she had long been engaged.

With all of which comes the end of our story, but if any of our readers want to know more of the doings of Young Klondike and his friends, let them buy the next issue of this series, which is full of stirring adventures from the first page to the last.

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